







## RUSSIAN SPRING

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IT WAS A HAPPY CHANCE THAT SENT PETER STUCLEY with his observant eye and satirical pen to modern Russia. Of *Two Months' Grace*, his first travel book, the *Sunday Times* spoke of his "quite unusual talent as a writer of lucidity and charm," and this talent has been put to admirable use in Mr. Stucley's impressions of the Soviet Union.

His journey took him to all the main centres of European Russia, to the Crimea, by boat across the Black Sea to the Caucasus and by aeroplane to Soviet Armenia and Erivan on the Iranian border, the most southerly town in the Union. Thence he travelled the length of Russia to Moscow and Leningrad, where he paid particular attention to the art galleries and theatres. He records some interesting conversations with all types, from Commissars and Georgian princes to writers and *ballerine*, and he has some original theories on the evolution of the present system, and the question of Communist culture.

*Russian Spring* is not the result of a hasty journey, but of a lengthy, thoughtful visit, made by an observant and witty young man with no political axe to grind. It presents a full picture of Russia, and is thoroughly up to date.



ALSO BY PETER STUCLEY

## TWO MONTHS' GRACE

A Contemporary Odyssey

"Quite exceptionally rich in observation, humour and a kind of calm satire that I found most attractive. Altogether a book to be recommended, and the name of the author noted." E. M. DELAFIELD, broadcasting.

"As clear and evocative a style as one has met in a travel-book for a long time . . . quite unusual talent as a writer of lucidity and charm." *Sunday Times*.

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"Mr. Stucley is a brilliant young man."—*Sheffield Independent*.

"He has succeeded in producing a book which anybody, of whatever opinion, can read with interest." GERALD GOULD in the *Observer*.





MONASTERY OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

*"Dazzling white, crowded with domes, and crowned with a great pagoda-like tower."*

*Peter Stucley*

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RUSSIAN SPRING

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*Illustrated with photographs taken by the Author*

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FOR  
E. M. D.

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P. S.



## PART I



## RAISON D'ÊTRE

**I**T ALL DEPENDED ON YOUR POINT OF VIEW. EVERYONE was agreed upon that. The mind, they all said, must be broad ; much broader, it seemed, than when you took it to other parts of the globe ; and your eyes must be sharp, kept perpetually skinned, in fact, for it was well known that They only showed you the things which They wanted you to see. One was to assume, then, for a visit to Russia the rôle of a policeman, always on the watch for crime and deception, and with a mind corresponding in breadth to the proverbial size of a constable's boots. Some, indeed, suggested that a form of life-preserver, or truncheon, should be included in the traveller's equipment which should take the form if not of a double-repeater, then at least of one copy of the Holy Book.

But what, I found myself reflecting, were the home treasures which I was expected to police ? And here, as I surveyed the scene close at hand, I found the very motives which were sending me to Russia. Further, it seemed, on reflection, that my rôle, rather than being guardian or evangelist, would be described more aptly as that of an enquirer.

I thought first of a certain valley in South Wales where not long before I had spent a winter. Down through the valley runs a river of coal-black water and on its narrow banks, between the river and the steep



mountain-side, stand row upon row of blackened dwellings, each row identical in appearance and in the fate of its occupants—or almost identical. There might be a week's work now and then for some of the younger men, but for most there was never any work at all, and there never will be again. "But in Russia, now," I would sometimes hear, "there is no unemployment. In Russia there is work for all, and equality and fairness, and decent living—in Russia —". In Russia . . .

One night, not long before the end of the year, I went into a wooden hall standing close to a railway siding at the remote head of the valley. Outside, it was dark and raining, the street broken and unlit, but inside the hall I found lights, energy, enthusiasm, and a spirit of confidence which I could scarcely believe to exist in that valley of lost souls.

"In Russia, comrades," the speaker was saying to the men crowding before him, "they've got a system which wouldn't permit conditions like ours. The workers of the Soviet Union have got their rights, comrades, and we must have ours. Think of Russia, comrades, and take courage. The day will come ! The day must come ! Think of Russia !" And there was a burst of cheering, and fists were raised in salute. Then the men went back to the potato stew, and the pillows of newspaper, and the deadening drabness. Think of Russia. . . . In a corner of the wooden hall, where the lights were turned out now, the domed forehead of the Lenin bust gleamed slightly in the unshuttered darkness. The wind blew round the hall, and up and down the valley, week in and week out, year after year. And the men whom I had grown to know, to admire and to respect

found that although their country generously permitted them to exist it could find no use for them, no use of any sort. Think of Russia . . .

My reflections brought me next to a room in London overlooking the western wing of the British Museum. The room represented the Literary Department of an eminent weekly review, its eminence being in no way indebted to the erudite nature of the building to which it stood neighbour, but adding, rather, a distinguished length to the shadow cast (when the sun was in the east) by the omniscient Museum. Of both the room and its view I became extremely fond and, since I spent my day there for several months on end, I grew equally familiar with both. It was not long before embassies from the Kremlin began to arrive in that little room and claim the attention. But in a different form than that which they had worn in Wales. They presented themselves, mostly, in the varied hues of the publishers' dust-jackets and carried letters of credence headed : "*Law, Life and Love in the U.S.S.R.*" or "*I Scrutinize the Soviets*" or "*Planned People*" or "*The Russian System of Child-birth and Abortion*" and many other such titles. I observed the growing number of these credentials and the deference with which they were examined, and I pondered once more on the country of their origin.

When evening came, and the gas-fire popped peremptorily away, one would move on to back-and-front rooms, with a fireplace by Adam and no modern conveniences, in the Fitzroy, Bedford, Tavistock quarter ; and there, as often as not, standing close to the bottles of gin and *vin ordinaire*, was one who had actually visited Soviet Russia. It was usually a she,

vaguely arty, and studiously broad-minded. Plied with questions she would imply, in answering, that though of course Communism was absolutely splendid and the Plan a roaring success the Russians themselves had such funny little whimsical ways. Pressed for examples of these whimsicalities the traveller would cite unpunctuality ("which sometimes has something rather attractive about it"), censoring of letters and newspapers, and occasionally, if the speaker was *very* broad-minded indeed, there would be a mention of labour-camps and even a food queue or two.

Russia became more intriguing than ever. And slowly, as I looked round on the modern world, a visit to Russia became a necessity.

In the noonday glitter of a million electric bulbs, betokening a twelve-hour service of entertainment, moved a confused and aimless people, fearing war, fearing illness, fearing the loss of a job, and dazzled by the certain vitality of the lights into taking a twice-weekly excursion into an untroubled Nirvana. So much for the people. Above them were their masters, a tiny company, but powerful, since the money and the methods of production were theirs. They too were confused and leaderless, fearing war and sudden death, the collapse of their fortune, and growing suspicious that the possession of money did not always win peace of mind. Still, they continued to make it, since money smoothed the paths of sexual intrigues, in which their only satisfaction was to be found. They conducted these intrigues—the middle-aged moneyed ones—in luxury flats fitted with mass-produced Empire furniture, and low-roofed night-clubs where no ham sandwich must cost less than ten shillings. And, since the true vitality of the lover had long since

dried up in their hearts, these amorous adventures had always to be conducted to music, to the mass-enjoyed radio in the flats, and to the soothing, all-night orchestra in the clubs. The music helped so much ; it made you forget and it made you remember, and it said, more or less, what you wanted to say yourself and didn't know how. Yes, without music the world could hardly be borne. Music sweetened the face of the present.

There were a few—mostly the young—who found another relief from this modern *malaise*. Their early world had been a sheltered world of the nanny, the perambulator, the private school, the public school and the security of the family Christmas. But, once emerged from these expensive swaddling-cloths, they found a thousand tongues in conflict, tongues speaking not in the soft assured tones of the nursery, the matron's room, and the school chapel, but in the strident assertive voices of the desperate, the voice of the dictator, the pit-man, and of big money. To whom should one attend ? To whom did one owe allegiance ? Which way, which way ? They sang bitterly, tragically, of their world which had had its day, and they looked to Communism to build them a new one. Longing desperately for an ideal which was compatible with reason they found their faith in Communism.

They too thought of Russia. . . . They spoke of " the new civilisation," of " the ten days which shook the world," of " the triumph of Socialism." And André Gide, in his journal, wrote that he only desired to live in order to see the final success of the Plan.

There could no longer be any doubt about it. I must go and see for myself this land where a new

freedom was being created, where all men and all women were on equal terms, and where reason, by all accounts, was enthroned.

There followed, on my decision, a few weeks of preparation, during which I was made to realise by my relations and friends that I was about to visit a barbaric and highly dangerous country. My own idea of Russia—the aim of a kind of spiritual pilgrimage—was soon dispelled by the number of suggestions of a strictly practical kind which were put to me. Insect powder and a travelling kettle were on the lips of all, and hard upon them followed a collapsible bath, pins and needles, charcoal and matches, rubber goloshes and a tail-coat (“they say the Russians will do anything for you if you play them jazz in tails”). I ended by taking none of these things and finding that all were dispensable. There was also the question of presents for the natives. Since tipping was said to be unknown in modern Russia, but small tokens of gratitude much appreciated, I was advised to carry a collection of articles which could be distributed on suitable occasions. Seasoned travellers to the Soviets assured me that lipstick, razor blades, quinine and, curiously, old hats were very serviceable. Others, who had visited the U.S.S.R. and suffered complete conversion to communism (usually by the influence of a ten days’ theatre festival in Moscow), declared that the Russians had everything they needed and that I should find my trinkets quite superfluous. Nevertheless, to be on the safe side, I invested in a range of oddments from the sixpenny stores and made them the foundation of my packing. I omitted, however, the old hats.

The language question presented a more serious

problem. I was determined not to be classed among those whose reported impressions were summed up in the phrase : " And of course he couldn't speak *one word* of Russian." I was determined not only to speak a dozen words at least, but to have at my finger-tips a number of useful phrases into the bargain. For several hours a day I sat beside the gramophone in the attentive attitude of that faithful and world-famous fox terrier and hung on the voice of an unknown Russian who was only too clearly my master. At length I convinced myself that I should at least be at home in any Russian parlour.

" Ah, there," I would say without hesitation as I entered the parlour, " is little Vera at the piano, and grandfather in his chair (why, he is reading a newspaper !), and the baby is in the cradle, and the fire is burning in the fireplace——"

Launched upon these striking observations it would, of course, be a simple matter to continue a light, parlour conversation. There was the grandmother's pretty needlework to admire, Ivan's (the grandson) red ball ; even, if hard pressed, the baby in the cradle. Yes, as long as the family kept to the parlour, I should be all right. But should they Go for a Walk in the Big City, Make a Journey on the Volga steamer, or, worst of all, Meet an Acquaintance, then I should be most uncomfortably tongue-tied. At all costs the family must be kept in the parlour.

The other phrases, which I at length mastered, required a specialised situation. They could not be used on all and every occasion.

I carefully memorised and repeated them aloud until each had a suitable dramatic ring :

" Guard, give me the key of the closet ! "

"I have lost *all* my money—kindly lend me two roubles. Here is my commercial card."

"Direct me, please, to the nearest rest-room."

"I am a foreigner. I require some brandy and some medical assistance."

"What is the cost of a letter to Cuba? and of this antique icon?"

"I am looking for the Anti-God Museum—kindly tell me its location."

"I wish to take a purgative dose and to spend the afternoon in the Park of Rest and Culture."

Thus fortified I applied for a Russian *visa*. In due course it was granted, and a hammer and sickle entwined with ears of wheat was stamped in violet ink upon my passport. From a mansion in Kensington Palace Gardens came a number of letters recommending me in the most flattering terms to persons of influence in the U.S.S.R. In the grill-room of the Waldorf Hotel I was treated to a foretaste of Russian hospitality.

The winter already was softening to spring, blossom was icing the trees in the orchards of Kent, and in London there was a new clearness in the light when the day came for me to start for Russia. At the last moment a well-intentioned relation put through a trunk-call to enquire what time-limit I had set, in case no news of my whereabouts was received. I had to admit that I had no time limit in mind, but that I understood the Russians were not in the habit of imprisoning tourists. And then I realised how very little I really knew about the Russian as a human being. At least, I should very soon learn for myself what they were really like. And perhaps Russia would give me the answers to other things besides.

## II

### VIA BERLIN

**W**HEN THE DAY COMES FOR DEPARTURE AND YOU actually reach the station and board the train which is to carry you to the coast it is always surprising, somehow, to find that others have selected that same date for the start of their journey. When people have asked you when you are actually leaving, and you reply : " the twelfth " or " the twenty-fifth " or " the sixth of next month," you announce the date with a kind of challenge. And they repeat the date with meaning : " Ah, the twelfth," and include in it a note of deference. It has become your private date. Others, you are willing to believe, are starting for Brittany or Pernambuco, on the 11th or 13th, but the 12th is the day on which you visualise the lines cleared for you and for you alone, and the longer the space of your journey, the more puffed up you become with your own importance, and the more convinced you are that the deep interest which the ticket agency has taken over each junction of your route, supplying you with pink and green and yellow passes over land and sea, must be displayed in the ticket-clippers and other officials at the station of departure, and even among that motley herd, your fellow-passengers, whom you now see clustered round the train, your train, your 8.30 p.m. from Liverpool Street, on the evening of the 12th, your 12th.



It is galling at first to have to admit to yourself that you are treated with a certain disregard, that the official of whom you smilingly enquire the way to the Continental express (your Continental express) mistakes your enquiry and directs you to the slow train for Bury St. Edmunds ; and then, when you finally find the seat in the compartment, of which you have been shrewd enough to memorise the number, you find that others are actually installed in the carriage and appear to regard you as a very unimportant member of their company.

Still, when you have taken a hasty look at their labels, there is consolation in the fact that they are marked "Bruges" and "Antwerp," while above your head swings the inscription, which you hope is fully legible : "Kiev, U.S.S.R., via Berlin and Warsaw."

Clearly, I was the only one with Russia as my destination. The rest were going to make holiday in Belgium or, a little prematurely, among the Dutch bulb fields. What a homely expedition ! Really, there was no need for these flushed, excited faces, no need for mother to lean in at the window and tell Ethel to keep a sharp eye on the hold-all, since one never knew with foreigners (there could be nothing in the hold-all so precious as my meat lozenges or the malted milk tablets or the razor blades which were to prove so serviceable, everyone agreed) ; no need to signify that, unless a post card was dispatched from Knocke immediately on arrival, it would be assumed at home that all was lost. Now if their destination was Kiev (U.S.S.R.), then perhaps . . . then, indeed . . . I decided that my fellow-travellers suffered from a distinct lack of proportion.

At Harwich, under the lamplight, as we formed a shuffling queue on the quay, it was clear that emotions engendered by the risks of venturing abroad still ran high. All, however, had observed the notice: "British this way"; and, remembering how it was a renowned national characteristic to keep a stiff upper lip in the face of danger, they were at pains to repress any signs of dismay at the ordeal before them and resorted instead to snatches of courageous conversation.

"My little walking-stick's going to be quite a friend, I can see," said one.

"Yes, the string's holding very nicely, thanks," from another.

"If you will just hang on to the fruit basket and my two cases, and perhaps my coat, while I get at the tickets. Oh, it's passports they want! Then I must have the fruit basket and the cases and my coat back again . . ."

"They say you can get a real English cup of tea at the Kursaal—and, besides, Zoote will be such an *experience*!"

So, growing more silent, we approached the barrier, suffered a casual scrutiny, and were in due course abandoned by our country as the steamer bore us away into the still spring night towards the fearsome unknown on the other side.

The courageous holiday-makers seemed all to have disappeared when in the early hours of the next morning I woke to find the ship tethered to an empty quay on which stood a notice-board announcing to seafarers, with inevitable clarity, that they had arrived at the Hook of Holland.

There was no suggestion of childish excitement on the Berlin express. We were bona-fide travellers,

engaged on important errands, necessitating portfolios and despatch-cases. We were not primarily travelling across Holland, but from one office to another, linked by a chain of cigars. At Rotterdam we were busy with porridge, at Utrecht with fried sausages, and as we travelled swiftly on that warm and lovely afternoon, across the uneventful pasture-land of Northern Germany, some of us fell into a heavy sleep, emitting deep Teutonic snores. For my part I was childishly attentive. Living, as we do, at a period when frontiers may at any moment be closed and the guns uncovered, there is an added interest nowadays in looking on a land, a sight of which may before long be forbidden, except at the cost of the heaviest fine ; and, as time goes on, and national spirits are whipped higher and higher, there is a strong possibility that on a later visit the face of the land may have utterly changed, may indeed be unrecognisable. It certainly adds to the interest of a European journey in these post-Great War years.

Over Berlin there hung an atmosphere of brooding yet Sabbatical quiet, due partly to the Nazi régime and partly to the fact that it was Maundy Thursday.

To one or the other, presumably, I owed the number of stray Germans, in shining black mackintoshes and wearing curiously over-trimmed hats, who stood about in stray groups in the grand marble hall of the Hotel Adlon, expostulating *sotto voce*.

Recalling that this renowned establishment was reputed to be the original setting of a particularly glamorous novel, I found these residents a trifle disappointing. Glamour, perhaps, has been suppressed by a cultural edict ; commercial vice has certainly been eliminated.

Those Berlin bars and *lokals* of quaint customs and patrons of indeterminate sex which, a few years ago, provided the franker novelists with material for a chapter or two have been converted into the worthier, if more tedious, beer-hall. Man must fight and woman must breed, that is the theme of the corporate state, and variations are not permitted.

So my attention was divided, on the evening of my arrival, between awful contemplation of General Goering's colossal Air Ministry and to the queues awaiting a performance of *Parsifal*. But the first element was definitely the more dominant. The crowd before the Opera was nothing in their piety to that which was assembled beneath the Chancellery balcony on which the Führer was wont to make an appearance. Blinds were drawn and there was no possibility of his being in Berlin, but the crowd was getting its thrill all the same. Personally, I should have preferred the flesh-and-blood appearance of Parsifal.

So far I had been only concerned with outward appearances; the ladies and gentlemen furtively begging in the Unter den Linden; a column of brown shirts tramping down side streets; the universal appeals to the German people to quit themselves like Spartans; the fluttering swastikas; the strolling evening figures.

But that night I became aware that I had come to a country which was actually under a reign of terror.

The atmosphere of the room to which I was taken was restless with a kind of false calm. Every now and again somebody went into a telephone cabinet and emerged with a piece of news on a strip of paper. A waste-paper basket overflowed on to the floor. A map

and a sheet of telegrams covered one wall. We sat about, uneasily, smoking cigarettes under a bright electric light, and every now and again somebody made a comment on the situation. They seemed to be waiting for something. At intervals a wireless was turned on, with the sound tuned down, and dance music drifted out, sounding very far away.

Presently hats and coats were unhooked and we removed to a tavern. A man was singing to a banjo in a corner, and there was a good deal of noise. People began to talk more freely.

Beheadings? Yes, they really take place. Concentration camps? I can show you a man who's just out. His hair is white now and he won't talk. Opposition? It means death if you're caught. Few dare. Food? Cheaper to spread propaganda on your bread than butter. And news? Slipped in at the letter-box, anonymously, by night.

A man got up from our table and left the café. Nobody knew who he was. After he'd gone they told me a good deal more. Before the Führer made a progress the Brown Shirts went round to the houses on the route selling flags and illuminations. You had to buy. And as he drove past, loudly acclaimed, there were soldiers in the sewers and on the roofs. And all you read about brutalities on Jews—was that true? Yes, except to the few at the top they couldn't afford to lose. I wondered if it was the beer and the brandy which made me feel I had come to a country of demented gangsters, but next morning, by the sober light of day, I had further proof.

I went to call on the eminent representative of a highly respectable English newspaper. His flat consisted of three rooms, opening out of one another, and,

before he began to talk, he told me to go into the farther room and to sit away from the telephone. He then opened wide the communicating doors and shut the curtained windows.

"Don't repeat this address aloud," he wrote on a piece of paper, giving me the name of a certain doctor living in the outskirts of Berlin, whom he suggested I might like to see. "Don't telephone to him and don't drive up in a taxi. The block is watched and the telephone is tapped." Here indeed were the makings of melodrama.

When I said I was on my way to Russia he took from the shelf a copy of *Mein Kampf* and showed me, point by point, how its author had so far fulfilled each of the major projects of his manifesto.

"What is the next step?" I asked.

He replied by reading to me the passage which tells of Germany's eastward ambitions and of her desire for the Ukraine.

"But she's got to get there first," he added, "through Poland, Czecho-Slovakia or Rumania."

"Which will it be?" I asked.

"We shall see," he added.

And perhaps by the time these words are written we shall have reached the last act of Hitler's programme. And Europe will be ready for the finale.

I attempted to find respite from these alarming results of twentieth-century civilisation by a visit to the Italian pictures in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum. But the doors were locked against Good Friday and attempts to cajole the stoker in charge of the central heating, whom I found in the basement, apparently the sole guardian of the collection, into letting me in, proved fruitless. He did his best for me, telephoning

to every Herr Professor and Frau Direktor on the management board, and for every call he made he requested from me a visiting card till, finally, he held a fistful of paste-board, but, alas, no permission, for one and all had correctly left Berlin for a week-end in the country.

Quite apart from Nazis and bureaucracy Berlin is not a city easy to take to heart. There is a magnificence in its buildings, but a drilled magnificence of a sort which makes one long for a movement out of step. But the Teutonic hand is heavy as far as the eye can see and no divergence is permitted. The cosmopolitan is happy in Vienna, where there is magnificence too, but an easy graciousness ; the statuesque magnificence of Berlin ends by being purely German and merely provincial. And there is nothing so sterilising to the soul as provinciality. Nationalism, which is only the provincial spirit on the grand scale, and Fascism, its child, are the natural products of the Berlin nursery. Foster-parents in other countries would do well to consider their local forcing ground before attempting to adopt offspring from the Germanic cradle.

I experienced a sense of unexpected relief to a degree which surprised me, after so brief a space of rule by salute and swastika, as the train crossed the German frontier into Poland some two hours after it had left the Friedrichstrasse station. The fact that I bore a Soviet *visa* on my passport accounted, perhaps, for the particularly ruthless examination of my luggage by the German custom officials. Notebooks presenting virgin pages were grimly scrutinised, overcoat pockets were turned out to reveal nothing more incriminating than a pile of biscuit crumbs, a box of

insect powder, which was indeed destined for the U.S.S.R., was shaken on to the palm of the hand, gingerly snuffed, and grudgingly declared innocuous, until at length thwarted, but earnest as ever, the Nazis went on their way—and left me to re-pack my effects.

By comparison the Poles appeared an especially kindly race. They went so far even as to welcome each traveller, at the modest charge of ninepence, with musical honours. This was made possible through the agency of a sprightly young woman—the “train hostess”—who proffered pairs of ear-phones to any who cared to listen to a wireless concert picked up by the train as it went on its way. Listening conditions were, however, by no means ideal. The day was warm, the ear-phones sticky, and, though the concert of sacred music was no doubt appropriate to the occasion (Easter Eve), it came through at a volume which was almost ear-splitting. I soon abandoned a well-nigh deafening performance of *Stabat Mater* for the less-distracting, if more commonplace, occupation of looking out of the window.

All day we travelled across the vast flat fields of Poland. Flights of rooks rose, as the train passed, from the spring sowing. Occasionally there were thick birch woods or a solitary windmill. The sky looked particularly wide above the flat expanse.

In the dining-car they were drinking tea from little glasses. We were drawing nearer to Russia, and the Eastern end of Europe.

Late in the evening, when it was dark, the train reached Warsaw where I had a few hours to spend before continuing my journey. A Polish friend in London had kindly promised that the hospitality of



his country should be extended to me during my brief stay. I had only, he said, to drive to the Hotel Europyiski and mention the name of his princely cousin for the prince and my dinner instantly to appear. In eager expectation, therefore, both of my dinner and my noble host, I drove to the appointed rendezvous, only to find it in semi-darkness and all but abandoned, save for an ancient of incredible antiquity, polishing the floor of the darkened cloak-room.

The porter showed recognition when I mentioned the name of the prince. But there were several of that family, six or seven, indeed ; Prince David, Prince Andrew, Prince Paul, Prince Alexander—which did I want? Drawing a bow at a venture I said : “Prince Paul.” Very well, he would telephone. But after a lengthy examination of the directory it turned out that not one member of the princely house possessed a telephone number.

Very well, I said, if I cannot have a prince I will have dinner. Which way was the restaurant?

The porter looked at me with an air of reproof.

Did I not know it was a fast day? The restaurant, of course, was closed. “Nor,” said the porter, with an air of pious fervour, “is there any food or drink to be had anywhere in Warsaw to-night.”

I begged (for I was very hungry indeed) for a plate of soup. A biscuit. Water. Some bread. I was not, I explained, a member of a fasting sect. Well, he would see what he could find. Some water, perhaps, and there might be some bread, left over.

Finally, sitting in the front bar of Warsaw’s most exclusive hotel, I was treated to a bowl of excellent red *bortsch* and a plate of scrambled eggs. A glass of

water was also provided. I ate alone under the shocked but envious eyes of the fasting page-boys.

Just before midnight, as the last lights of the hotel were being extinguished, I drove back to the station through the glistening wet streets. Beside the sleeping-car, which was to take us as far as the Polish border, had assembled the little party destined for Russia. Except for Sonia and me the rest were travelling right through Russia on their way to Persia. There were two German business men, plump and jolly ; a couple of middle-aged Danish ladies, missionaries ; and a Persian gentleman from New York, bound for Teheran. He was short and swarthy and nervously ran a comb through his tight black hair. Sonia was very *soignée* and elegant. She came from the Warsaw Opera and was on her way to sing over the radio in Kiev and Moscow. Surrounded by a mound of little suitcases bound in patent-leather and decorated with check stripes she stood, aloof from the others, smoking an American cigarette.

Looking at the railway map of Europe in the corridor, as we moved gently out of the station to the chink of the water-bottles in the *wagons-lit*, I noticed that the lines came to an end at Zubrodnov, the Polish border. Thence, far out of the reach of the map, stretched an uncoloured territory simply labelled : " U.S.S.R."

I woke to find myself, rather surprisingly, in a train, on Easter morning, approaching the Russian frontier. I was still in a Christian country. Through the window I could see domed churches on small hills, and by each church door a little knot of people were gathered for the first Mass of the day. Odd blue crosses stuck up at all angles in the graveyards.

It was a bright, windy morning. At eight o'clock we reached the last Polish station and had to abandon the sleeping-car and transfer ourselves into the meaner carriage which was to carry us to the land of the proletariat. For another half-hour we were in Poland; then—and this was most impressive—I saw ahead, on either hand of the dead straight line, the separate strips of Polish farming cease suddenly, and, beyond, and to the horizon, a dark sweep of ploughland which I knew must mean collective farming, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The train passed very slowly beneath a wooden archway, painted green and bearing an inscription in Russian begging the workers of the world to throw off their chains, and pulled up at the small frontier halt over which flew a dingy red flag. It paused for only a minute or two, and when it moved on again I leant with some emotion from the window to obtain a first view of the land of Revolution. We had advanced only a few yards into Russia, however, when the train drew up abruptly and I observed that a cow had strayed from its collectivisation on to the line, and was being chased away by the young Red Army sentries who had stood so impressively at the salute as we had crossed the border. With their brown overcoats, like long dressing-gowns, flying behind them, they shoo-ed the cow from our path, until at last the line was cleared and one might once more compose one's emotions in the appropriate manner for arrival.

At Shepetovka all had to leave the train and porters, wearing long linen aprons, bore our luggage into the customs hall. Nothing could have been more business-like or agreeable than the manner of the *douaniers*. They opened every piece of luggage but only took a

real interest in the amount of money carried on the person. Books were scrutinised and the drawings of Tenniel (I had packed a volume of *Alice*) provoked attention, but were apparently pronounced harmless. I glanced about me to see how my companions were faring.

Upon the wall above us were painted the words : "Prolétaires de tous les Pays, unissez-vous !" and exactly beneath this exhortation stood Sonia deftly painting her lips, elegantly disregarding the searching of her dressing-case. The Persian was still nervously combing his hair, and the German business men were lighting cigars, while the Danish missionaries were imploring the porter in dumb-show for a cup of tea. I felt that we were none of us justified in obeying the injunction on the wall.

After a lengthy wait, necessitated by the filling-up by the officials of many documents, we were at length declared fit to pass into the Soviet Union ; and, the examination over, the *douaniers* lit up cigarettes and motioned us to the train. The clock had jumped two hours, I noticed ; we were in Eastern Europe.

Sonia and I were alone in the carriage which was high and cavernous and smelt strongly of kerosene. As soon as the train started, the interpreter, who was dressed from head to foot in blue velveteen, invited us to luncheon in the dining-car, and the conductor, who wore pince-nez and looked like a schoolmaster, produced a meal of chicken soup, veal cutlets, with excellent vegetables, and a compote of fruit, a dish with which I was to become intimately acquainted in the succeeding weeks, but now, recalling stories of appalling food shortage, welcomed with innocent delight.

Our table was set with palms in pots refinely

decorated with paper frills, and the Danish ladies, recognising the homely touch and feeling, doubtless, that they were now securely set on the path towards their pious endeavours, ordered a carafe of vodka which produced almost instantaneous hiccoughs and necessitated a hasty retirement.

The train bowled along at a steady thirty-five miles an hour through forests of firs or across the flat Ukrainian plain. Everywhere I saw signs of construction ; cottages being re-painted, piles of timber at the stations, railway lines being re-laid. At each stop a crowd of drab peasants, with shawls or handkerchiefs over their heads, forced their way into the hard-class carriages at the head of the train. An Army officer, with his head closely shaved, stood with his wife and child by the door of my compartment. I remembered the words of those who had declared that no Russian would ever speak to a foreigner ; I memorised the appropriate phrase, and, doing my best to reproduce an echo of the gramophonic voice, I enquired the age of the child.

“ She is fourteen months old,” came the reply in Russian. At a first attempt I had been understood and could understand. Moreover, a Russian had actually spoken to me. Daring to attempt no more than an expression of admiration for the fine cameo brooch worn by the officer’s wife I retired, feeling well satisfied, into my cavernous compartment where I found Sonia prosaically polishing her nails and nibbling *croquettes* of imported milk chocolate.

When we arrived, late that night, the Lincoln car, of which the travel agency had spoken so frequently, was duly waiting for me at Kiev station, as was one of the Intourist guides, of whom we have read so much.

Sonia, still holding herself aloof from the proletarian approach, was installed, and we were driven rapidly to an unnamed destination which proved to be the Hotel Continental. I was surprised, I remember, by the bright lights in the shops and by the throng of people on the pavements. But after a journey of thirty-six hours I was not surprised to find that the sight of my bed, though it had an iron bedstead, was a very welcome one. My bedroom itself was not the height of frivolity. It was high and square, with its walls painted a deep brown. By the door was a small separate washing place with a shower, and a floor of dark brown tiles, like a stable. But though the general impression was of a Victorian dinginess I comforted myself with the discovery that nothing was actually dirty.

### III

## UKRAINE

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THE OPENING QUESTION PUT TO ME ON THE FIRST morning of my stay at Kiev, by the charming young woman at the service bureau of the hotel, convinced me that I had indeed come to the new Russia.

“Would you,” she asked, “prefer to visit a crèche (we have some nice ones here), the prophylactorium for former prostitutes, or the old monastery?”

It was, indeed, a startling variety of choice, and I feared I must have lost considerable prestige when I plumped for the old monastery. Still, I did my best to imply that I was keeping the newer institution as a *bonne bouche* and was merely paying a courtesy visit to Russia’s ancient monuments.

To the old monastery I was presently driven, along with a guide who strongly resembled my French governess and kept me under as strict an eye. Recollecting that Kiev was the birth-place of Njinsky my preconceived idea of the town had been largely formed in terms of Russian ballet décor. In winter I saw it looking like the fair scene in *Petrushka*; in summer like the back-cloth of the last scene of *Fire Bird*, a hill of pink churches with golden domes. The reality, as realities almost inevitably do (Delphi is one of the few exceptions), proved eminently prosaic.

Kiev, which has lately superseded Kharkov as the capital of the Ukraine, is built on a number of sloping hills above the Dnieper. From the wide main street, of two-storied houses painted a chalky white, lead other streets, mounting steeply or descending rapidly with no particular object in view. Through the streets, at a reckless pace, are driven a number of cheap Ford-like cars. Streets and buildings seem to be flawless and at all angles. Here was the former Duma, a mid-nineteenth-century building of red brick ; here, on this mound, a public garden, with its trees still black and leafless ; here a palace of Nicolas (which must not be photographed) ; there a former school for daughters of the aristocracy, close by a brewery and a Red Army club. "No doubt," I said confidently to my guide, "you are re-planning the town and all will soon be put to rights." "But, of course," she replied, and pointed to the General Post Office which, she said, had had *two more floors* added to it recently.

We approached the long wall which surrounds the Lavra, and I saw the gold domes of the Uspenski Cathedral shining in the rain. We entered beneath an archway decorated with gold and with fading frescoes of scenes from the lives of SS. Anthony and Theodosius, and found inside a long paved courtyard planted with fir trees. At the end stood the cathedral, its flat façade adorned with panels, on which were painted, in rich and fading colours, scenes from lives of saints, and crowned with seven domes. The interior was redecorated, in the nineteenth century, with much gilt and brass and had nothing of great interest to offer. The miraculous icon which, according to legend, was given by the Virgin to Hilerion, the



founder of the monastery, is still in place above the *ikonostas*, but all the large jewels have been removed from it. There are, of course, no monks remaining and no services are held. Some female comrades were sitting about in the cathedral knitting, while one, at the door, was engrossed in *War and Peace*. My guide was careful to emphasise the avariciousness of the monks, and showed me a pile of empty vodka bottles stowed under the altar with the censers, just as they had been found, she said.

Down the wide flight of wooden steps, up which, only twenty years ago, pilgrims from all over Russia came crawling on hands and knees, I was taken to see the catacombs. I am never fond of catacombs, and these were particularly uninviting, for the Soviet Government, in order to expose the practices of the monks, have caused every saintly relic to be exposed to full view, so that the peasant can see that the mummified corpse he formerly worshipped is no more than an ordinary skeleton. Tombs have been opened and walls thrown down until the catacombs resemble nothing more than an enormous charnel-house. Superstition must be very deep-rooted in the Russian peasant to make such a crude display necessary. It merely made me feel rather sick. Nor did I specially care for the bodies of half-decomposed bats, calves and mice lying alongside the corpse of a priest which were on view in the entrance hall to prove that an animal buried in the local sandstone soil was preserved as well as a man of God. The guide was keen for me to see the room used by the monks, she said, as a factory to manufacture bones which they had sold to the ignorant as the relics of Saints; but, though I hastened to

assure her of my belief in its existence, I said I preferred to look at the view. I had had enough of bones.

From the Lavra, on its high bluff above the Dnieper, one surveys a wide expanse of country. The river was in flood and its waters covered the land for many miles, cutting it into little lakes and lagoons. A cluster of houses, with rust-red iron roofs, standing on piles, had been isolated by the flood. It was still a winter landscape with only here and there, at the foot of the monastery hill, a tree half-leaved.

I spent some time examining the renowned Cathedral of Saint Sophia, which stands at the other end of the city from the Lavra. Owing to a curious excrescence of boarding and the ill-chosen position of the telegraph poles it was hard to obtain a clear view of the exterior, which, though it no longer bears its original form, is a good example of seventeenth-century Ukrainian baroque. The outside fabric seemed to be in bad condition and paint and plaster were fast peeling from the fine eighteenth-century belfry, but the authorities appeared to be conducting a thorough examination of the interior. Since all the priests have left (services in the cathedral have been discontinued for the past three years) they have it all their own way.

The great blue mosaic of the Kiev Virgin looks down on the scaffolded hall (for now that the religious intention has been removed that is what the cathedral has now become), and ranged below the solitary figure are the tawny Byzantine figures of the Apostles of the Double Communion. In a side chapel rests the superb Byzantine tomb long supposed to contain the remains of Yaroslav, who constructed the cathedral in 1030-1049, and was father-in-law to Harold, King of

England. Lately, however, the sarcophagus was opened and found to contain the mingled bones of two persons, male and female, by which it is inferred that the tomb was plundered by the Tartars, the original body and its accompanying treasure removed, and two other corpses buried in its place. In any case, said the Soviet *savant* who accompanied me, King Yaroslav must have paid a bargain price for his tomb, for on moving it from its original position one side was found to be undecorated.

Eighty per-cent of the frescoes have now been uncovered, and in the dim light I had pointed out to me four female figures which have been identified as Hildegarde, wife to Yaroslav ; Anne, their eldest daughter, consort to Henry I of France ; and her sisters Elizabeth and Anastasia, Queen of Hungary. The unique eleventh-century frescoes of secular life in Constantinople were, unfortunately, in their position on the spiral staircase, under so poor a light that it was impossible to view them properly.

Somewhat as a concession to my interest for the antique I was driven to see the Church of Saint Andrew, a creation of Rastrelli, the Italian architect, of eighteenth-century baroque. It stands superbly, a building of white and gold, with blue ornamentation, on a little promontory, sheer above the river, and on the spot where, according to tradition, the Apostle Andrew, the first preacher of the Gospel in Russia, erected a cross. Seen from below, as you approach the church up a broad flight of steps, the group of columns decorating the side recall a Bakst perspective. The door was barricaded and I had to peep through the keyhole to see some good baroque decoration in dark red and gold, and a great deal of scaffolding.



KIEV

- (i) *Cathedral of Saint Sophia.*
- (ii) *Church of Saint Andrew.*



Below me again was the flooded river and the rust-red roofs of houses in the Podol quarter.

My courtesy visits to the old Russia being concluded I submitted myself, with equal curiosity, to an inspection of the new, and was conducted first to a crèche and then to one of the People's Courts. It was a nice crèche ("but you must not photograph it"), modern in design, light and airy, and the children clustered round me, crying: "Uncle, Uncle!" and seeming well and happy. The woman doctor who took me round proudly admitted that it was the best crèche in Kiev. She has been given a medal for her success.

The People's Court reminded me exactly of the trial of Poor Cock Robin. Justice was being meted out in a small and very stuffy room, and Truth was represented by a photograph of Lenin reading a copy of *Pravda*. The judge, sitting at a table covered by a red cloth, was a woman with very dirty hands and a white woollen beret who cocked her head on one side and gave sharp little bird-like glances round the courtroom. The clerk, who took down the proceedings in a bored and laborious manner, was also a woman, and an older woman, resembling a griffon, played the part of prosecuting counsel. A silent young man, with a hang-dog expression, was also on the tribunal.

The case was of a youth who had stabbed another youth in the back. Vodka, and the fact that the incident took place on New Year's Eve, were, I was told, mitigating circumstances; it was nothing but an act of hooliganism. Could it not, I asked, be described as attempt at murder? Oh, no, boys will be boys, was the equivalent to the answer I received.

Was stabbing a common occurrence? Goodness me, no—but New Year's Eve is New Year's Eve, and everybody gets a little merry then.

The victim, who had been four months in hospital and was supported by a stick, gave evidence and seemed in no way put out by the assault. Indeed, he greeted his assailant, who was sitting at the back of the court, with a nod and a wink. When a fresh witness was required whoever happened to be sitting next to the door shouted his name into the passage. It was all very informal; very informal indeed. This must be the free spirit of the new Russia, I thought.

Finally, I learnt that Kiev possessed an art gallery newly formed by assembling pictures from private collections now nationalised. It was a strange assortment of objects, shields, armour, weapons, pictures and furniture all arranged higgledy-piggledy; but I discovered a good Spinello Aretino, a Jacopo del Sellaio of Orpheus and Eurydice, a Montagna Madonna and Child, a fourteenth-century tryptich by a Sienese master, two beautiful Florentine standards, a Velasquez, and two so-called Poussins, also four fine Gobelin tapestries illustrating scenes from the life of Don Quixote. "We are making our own Gobelins now," interjected my guide, and showed me, in the next room, a large tapestry representing Stalin, in a pastoral landscape, surrounded by adoring children. I said it was a very striking piece of work, and that both sets of tapestry were very interesting, in their way.

I was informed that the writers of the Ukraine would receive me, and I was given an appointment at the Ukrainian Writers' Club on a certain afternoon. It was a whitewashed building, not unlike a drill hall, seething with persons whom I took to be authors. Six

or seven of them came forward and spoke to me with the greatest cordiality. All, it appeared, were best-sellers (200,000 copies, at four roubles apiece, was the sale of a popular work). No government, they declared, could treat its authors as well as the Soviet. As soon as you became an author (and one book sufficed to give you such a standing) the State paid you a regular salary in addition to royalties. In a neighbouring wood the State had placed, at the disposal of its writers, a special House of Creation. There were many writers in the Ukraine, they told me ; it was a popular profession. The House of Creation was often full up.

“Supposing,” I asked, “any writer felt inclined to criticise the state of affairs or even to reproach the Government for any possible shortcomings, would he enjoy these privileges ? ”

Naturally not, was the answer. For, to begin with, the State owned all the publishing houses and would not print such a work, and, to continue, there could not possibly be a public for such a book.

“And now tell us,” they said, “how is the revolutionary movement among the peasants in your country ? We have read the proletarian organ, *New Verse*. That speaks often of revolution.”

I said that there were few peasants, in the Russian meaning, in England, and that the contributors to *New Verse* were mostly from a district of London, called Bloomsbury, or young students from the universities of Oxford or Cambridge. I said that though there was a noticeable feeling of disturbance in England there was, as yet, no general desire for revolution.

I had brought with me a copy of Eliot's poems, and one of the writers, who had been to the States and



spoke with a pronounced American accent, opened the book at random and read aloud, as follows :

“ We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas !  
Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless  
As wind in dry grass  
Or rats’ feet over broken glass  
In our dry cellar.”

Before I left, Golovko, Koulik, Pervomaiski, and Ivan Lé each gave me, most kindly, signed copies of their works.

Kiev has, after Moscow, the largest film studios in Russia, and I was delighted when it was suggested that I should pay them a visit. The studios were all contained under one roof, as vast as Paddington Station, and appeared to be well equipped, though I was told that the best lighting system, which could only be obtained from Germany, was not available owing to the present relations between the two countries. To the inexperienced eye the component parts of a film studio offer as many surprises as the elements of a surrealist picture. Here was a thatched cottage with a garden of gay sunflowers and a path of paving-stones, yet, suspended an inch from its chimneys, hung a four-wheel carriage, the whole scene plunged in an uncanny twilight. Close by a negro and a little boy, heavily rouged, were playing a game of chess (they were making a film of *Tom Sawyer*) and, on the next set, a woman in a Victorian hoop was hammering at a raft, under a battery of fizzing lights, while some children in red ties were being marshalled

before acting in a propaganda film about competition in schools.

My visit happened to coincide with that of a celebrated Stakhanovite worker, Dukhanov, who had come especially from the coal-mines in the Don Valley to witness a film, which had just been completed in that area, and to give his official criticism. I was invited to watch the special showing. The story was from Adyenkos' novel *Ja Loubloo* ("I Love") and told of an elderly man driven by the exploiting capitalists to work in the most hazardous part of the mine in order to earn a higher wage. There is a fall of rock, the man is imprisoned in the mine, goes mad and dies. His son calls for revenge. The photography was brilliant, as brilliant as any of the older Russian films, but the story tediously slow. The showing lasted for two hours and I was told that the film was in three parts and we had only been shown the first. A short animated cartoon followed, inspired by Stalin's dictum: "If a foreign pig thrusts his snout into our Soviet garden he will get what he deserves." The pig (wearing a swastika arm-band), escorted by a fox (the Church) who holds aloft a cross and blesses him, proceeds to the frontier of the U.S.S.R., where the Soviet, in the shape of a small boy, Tuk-Tuk, who wears on his head a cabbage leaf shaped like a Red Army cap, encounters him. The pig directs an attack of his caterpillars and rats, but is successfully repulsed by Tuk-Tuk's battery of beans. It was well done in the Disney manner.

When the session was over Dukhanov and I were asked our opinions of the first film by the director. Dukhanov, who was a burly, honest-looking miner in a sumptuous overcoat befitting a leading Stakhanovite,

said that although he had found the picture sad he thought that his comrades in the Don would enjoy it. Everyone then drank a glass of orange squash and appeared relieved by Dukhanov's verdict.

I had heard much of the theatres for children in Russia, and Kiev gave me an opportunity of visiting one. The play performed was based on a poem of Gogol's "Sorochinsk Fair," a comedy of peasant life acted so broadly that few could fail to understand it. It employed a comic horse, a comic bear, and a revolving stage, together with some delightful singing and dancing and a faultless setting. At the Opera I saw a cheerful operetta composed from folk-tunes and containing some exciting Ukrainian folk-dances. The production, however, was extremely ornate : a scene in the harem of the Sultan was like a spectacular revue in Paris. What interested me more than the production was the audience. Except for perhaps 10 per-cent, it resembled any middle-class Continental gathering of the same sort. The men wore dark suits and stiff white collars and ties, the women skirts and blouses, and some even attempted a kind of evening dress of antique pattern, sometimes adding a shawl or a comb for further embellishment. Most of the women were made-up and had their hair waved in stiff and unbecoming fashion. Couples cuddled unashamedly during the love duet of the opera. Were these the people who had made a revolution? The foyer upstairs was decorated with enlarged photographs of "shock-workers." There was a champion tractor-driver and a brawny young woman who had milked a cow faster than anyone else. But the audience appeared to be paying more attention to the refreshment bar, where there were ices and cakes and bottles

of beer to be bought. Only the poor foreigners with twenty-five roubles to £1 could not afford to refresh himself.

I felt that I could not well leave the Ukraine without paying a visit to a collective farm, and this, accordingly, was arranged for the last day of my stay.

“It will be a long excursion and can only be undertaken with *l'estomac bien garni*,” advised the French professor, a fellow-traveller, who was to join me in visiting the farm. I had already found Russian meal-times more than a little trying. Luncheon (or dinner as it was more democratically termed) was seldom obtainable until 4 p.m., while the evening meal was not usually ready until 11 p.m., or later. My digestion was fortunately sympathetic to the change of feeding time, but I found the lack of sleeping hours added to the racket of Russian travel.

We drove out of the city along a dead-straight road with forest on either side for most of the way. The main road was good, tarred and well-kept; but by its side ran a broad, muddy track, along which were driven a number of dilapidated farm-carts, drawn by skinny horses, and a couple of rattling tanks. The district seemed alive with soldiers and each bridge (all were of wood) was guarded by a sentry. We passed a large aerodrome and I saw several big machines in flight. The guide informed me that the small wooden houses to be seen among the trees were the former dwellings of noblemen.

The farm lay some way off the main road and was an hour-and-a-half's drive from Kiev. It was called Bolshevik Farm, a name chosen, we were told, by the inhabitants themselves.

It presented, to the eyes of a Western European, a pitiable appearance.

On unlevelled ground, in a clearing in a thin wood, stood a few dirty white buildings arranged in no particular order, but having for a centre a red-brick tower, built as a mill under the former ownership and now used as a water tower. Although the windows of the tower were cracked or broken it was the only solid-looking building I could see. The whole place was thick with mud.

As soon as we got out of the car the Professor and I were surrounded by a cluster of children and by a group of men who had apparently nothing better to do. The Professor and I agreed, in a discreet French undertone, that first appearances were not prepossessing. The head of the farm, wearing a thick, black padded jacket, appeared, and, leading us off out of earshot of the others, explained the workings of the farm. It was run, he said, by four hundred families who lived in separate cottages a mile or more away, and it formed fifteen hundred hectares, with six hundred cows and four hundred pigs. Each family is permitted, by recent legislation, to own one pig and one cow for itself. Yes, it was proving a great success. He would show us the animals and we could judge for ourselves.

From one shed to another we ploughed through the mud, the Professor supported by an umbrella which he refused to unfurl, despite the heavy drizzle. Calves and pigs there certainly were in plenty ; but, though I am no agriculturalist, it appeared to me that their housing was under conditions of unusually bucolic squalor. We were conducted through the vegetable garden, in which I was struck by a fine crop of radishes, but nothing more ; to the village school,

where the children of the farm workers were educated.

The schoolmistress, elderly, voluble, untidy and full of smiles, received us in her office, with her male staff, looking very dishevelled, ranged behind her. Communism, she said, was a wonderful system. She had recently received, together with all the other schoolmistresses in the Union, a rise in salary and was going to buy a fur coat for the winter. But we must see the school, she said, and led us to the class-rooms which were bare, shabby and unheated. As an intelligence test, for our benefit, an algebra problem of seemingly great complication was set on the blackboard ; and, after a tense few minutes, successfully solved by a boy of fifteen. The Professor was much impressed by this, but disturbed to find, when he pointed to a map of Europe and asked another pupil to show him the position of various towns and countries, that the boy only knew the whereabouts of the Fascist states.

Before we left, our companions took us to see the club-room of the collective farm which now occupied the former village church. What struck me, as soon as we entered, was that a stage had been erected on the spot where the altar had formerly stood, and before it hung a curtain, in the place of the holy screen ; otherwise there was nothing at all remarkable to be seen. The usual texts from Lenin and Engels, with which I had now become accustomed, decorated the walls, and a billiard-table stood on the spot which, it was hastily pointed out, had once been regarded as the most sacred.

As we motored back to Kiev the Professor informed me that he had been in Russia for six weeks and, with

admirable Gallic economy, that he was taking back all his dirty linen to be washed at home. Prices charged for washing compared, he said "*à la folie furieuse*." He spoke fluent Russian and was on his second visit to the country. Much of it, he said, impressed him greatly, but the Russians were talking nonsense when they called themselves a civilised nation. In any case, only 10 per cent of the rulers were Russians, the rest were Jews and Caucasians. He scoffed at the claim of a classless society, and I later saw him give a large tip, which was at once accepted. But capitalism must change itself, or die, he thought, though Soviet Communism was not, he believed, the solution for the more highly-developed countries. For the Russian it was easier "*parce qu'ils aiment vivre en troupeau*."

Before I took my departure I made a careful inspection of the goods exhibited in the main shopping streets of Kiev. Wine, fishing-tackle, bread, sweets, scent, soap, books, clothing, medicines, all of a rough home-made quality (nothing at all, I noticed, came from abroad), were to be had in plenty. The display was attractively arranged but I saw nothing which reached English standards. But the general impression was of a more plentiful supply of necessities than I had been led to expect in England, and of a certain tinsel brightness. The people in the streets were not ill-dressed, but there was a drabness over all. I did not observe a single smartly-dressed person, and shoes were either of the cheapest leather, fabric, or of canvas and rubber. Every face, though it did not exhibit indigence, bore the stamp of a hard life.

I cannot conclude this account of my visit to Kiev without recording the kind hospitality of a certain commissar and his wife who twice entertained me at their house. I remember a handsome apartment and amusing cosmopolitan talk in a charming *salon*. I remember, too, some excellent Russian cognac produced for my benefit and the singing by my hostess, who had a professional's voice, of a song entitled : "Rosita, Rose of Teheran." Such an interlude was welcome in a world of provincial propaganda which I was already beginning to find a trifle oppressive.

### KHARKOV

The ventilating system in the roof of the compartment had gone wrong, and all through the night there was much uneasy shoving and stirring on the part of myself and my travelling companions. The atmosphere was stifling. At 3 a.m. one, more enterprising than the rest, and possessed of a natty pair of pale blue underclothing, made a perilous ascent to the ceiling and attempted (chiefly by the use of his teeth, so far as I could make out in the dim light) to save us all from asphyxiation. Presently he descended to declare that nothing could be done and, beating his breast and declaring his lungs would shortly burst, he disappeared into the corridor. The rest of us resigned ourselves to an unhealthy slumber and no one was capable of moving until ten o'clock in the morning, when some repaired to the dining-car to breakfast off *wiener schnitzel*.

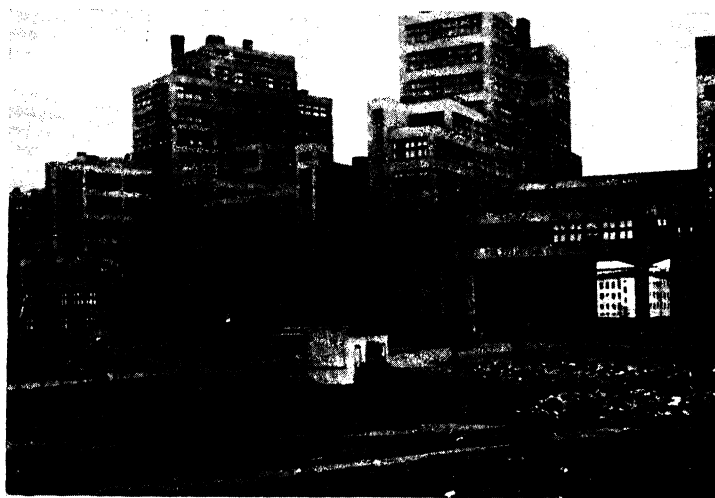
There was no motor available when I arrived at Kkarkov, and I was shown, accordingly, into a waiting room reserved, I was told, for Government officials.



It was furnished in Tsarist splendour, with colossal pieces of Empire furniture and long mirrors, elaborately decorated. As I waited a commissar, with his wife and child, were driven away by a chauffeur in a Packard Straight 8.

Kharkov is the Detroit of Russia : it also has the noisiest trams in the Union. All day and all night they clanged up and down the square below my window in the Krassnaya Hotel. Sleep was very difficult. The American air is supplied by the vast grey piles known respectively as the Palace of Industry and the Palace of Projects, which form an austere semicircle—as if the monoliths of Carnac had been smoothed and pierced with windows—in the high and windswept Dzerjinsky Square, and house the administrative offices of the whole Ukraine. From the roof of the fourteenth floor the rest of Kharkov, planless, smoky, and bounded by bleak steppe, to the horizon, lay below. In the suburbs of the town my guide pointed out the domes of two churches (“very modest, as you will see”) which were still permitted. Otherwise, it was heavy industry all the way.

Tractor Plant City lay a little outside the town (“straight on and past the turbine *combinat*”) and was approached by a triumphal way, broad, macadamised and of American design. When the car in which I was driving had passed along the mile-long façade of the factory it drew up, the engine was turned off, and it was suggested that I should contemplate the buildings. Permission could not, of course, be given to approach closer. Sentries guarded the entrances ; smoke belched from the chimneys. Inside, twelve thousand people were conducting the Great Experiment. Norms undoubtedly were rising ; figures of



KIEV  
*A group of Ukrainian writers.*

KHARKOV  
*Palace of Industry.*



production being doubled, trebled, and every six minutes, I was informed, a new tractor was born into the world. As my guide informed me of these facts, in low and reverent voice, I seemed to be gazing on a Holy Place. The sentries were the guardians of the precincts, the smoke the incense of devotion. Within, the words of Marx were heartening the faithful. A hooter (the sanctuary bell) sounded, marking a halt in the proceedings, and at once from the portals of the Place there poured a stream of participants. Speaking scarcely a word, with heads bent in decorous meditation, they made for their dwellings, which were built in tall rows within easy reach, to rest a little before the next shift of their holy labour.

As they passed before me, this stream of men and women, girls and youths, I tried to read something into the expression on their faces. Here were the workers of the U.S.S.R., the most publicised workers in the world. If they frowned, the Right rejoiced ; if they smiled, the Left smiled with them. According to the propaganda photographs nothing induced á broader grin of contentment than the privilege of working for the socialised State. How, then, did they appear as they poured from this palace of labour ? They hurried separately, inscrutably, but with an air of purpose, towards their homes. If they had worn a uniform they would have been indistinguishable from one another, for each face wore the same purposeful but dulled expression. As it was, their clothes of varying drabness aroused an interest in the individual. For a second or two the eye dwelt on this one or on that, guessing vainly of a home, a husband, a wife. There were still persons among the people. When they had passed I asked whether I might visit some of these

same workers in their houses, and was told that for an extra charge of ten shillings this might be arranged.

Accordingly I was conducted to a new block of battleship grey colouring surrounding a courtyard and containing two hundred and sixty flats, all belonging to workers of the Kharkov bicycle factory. The block was situated on a rubble-covered and treeless eminence, shadowed by the giant Palace of Industry, and I was escorted over it by the burly chairman of the Flats Committee.

First, he said, I must see his piano which he had recently obtained on the hire-purchase system. It was his to do what he liked with and he would leave it to his son. As to his flat, did I not think he was very fortunate to have such a beautiful home? The living-room was furnished, and over-furnished, in much the same style as its English equivalent. On the walls hung moonlit scenes and, side by side with framed testimonials from the Red Army Revolutionary Commissariat, was displayed an enlarged photograph of the flat's owner in his pre-Revolutionary Tsarist uniform, while, in place of the pot of aspidistra, there hung, before the window, a basket of trailing smilex, and below it a row of cacti. I noticed that each flat was fitted with a kitchen, and I enquired whether much use was made of these since I had been told that a communal restaurant was attached to each block of flats. These families, was the answer, prefer to eat in their own flat. There is more privacy and, besides, there is the radio to listen to after supper. The picture was considerably more homely than the robot forcing-house commonly held to be the lot of the Soviet worker. "Of course," said my informant, "not all the workers of Kharkov are as fortunately

placed as we. Many, many houses are still to be built. But you must remember that fifteen years ago there was empty steppe where now there are the streets and houses of a new city.”

As I came out into the well-courtyard of the block, I commented on the number of children sitting about aimlessly on the benches or engaged in rather lifeless games on the dusty floor of the court.

My remark caused me to be conducted, a little later, to an institution known as the Palace of Pioneers, a name suggesting marble halls and the Gold Ruse, but which proved to be a kind of *Paradis des Enfants*, housed in the former Kharkov Country Club of Regency design, and one of the happiest institutions I was to see in Russia. Pioneers of both sexes, aged eight to eighteen, chased one another unchecked up and down the marble staircase, danced a version of ring o’ roses on the parquet floors of the reception saloons, beneath the quavering crystal chandeliers, or lolled collarless and worn out on sofas of gilt and red velvet. For those who preferred a more organised occupation (and most apparently did) diversions of all kinds were provided. There were laboratories of science and chemistry, model tramways, telephones, aeroplanes, a carpentering class, a puppet theatre, a large concert hall, a room labelled “Arcticians” (for students of the Far North), chess rooms and music rooms, a library of books (from which children in out-lying districts were supplied), and a library of games, toys, and even bicycles. I even saw a ballet school for little girls of eight and nine, each dressed in white bodice and *tu-tu*, under the direction of a young male dancer who was taking infinite pains and patience with the children. There seemed, indeed, to be

almost a surfeit of interests and I enquired whether the children were really able to make full use of the place.

I was assured that full use was made of the Palace, since the children came mainly of the better educated classes, such as engineers and such highly-paid officials.

It was suggested, with some insistence, that I should like to see the club for Kharkov railway workers and the factory for mine-appliances, and little attention was paid when I declared myself agreeable to the idea but scarcely a factory specialist.

The club was a new construction and presented a bold exterior of concrete and straight lines, so that I was disappointed to find within, instead of the expected modernities, a display of antimacassars, battalions of cacti and crayon portraits of the Leaders. Still, I remember with pleasure the chaise-longue for the tired engine-driver, and the ballet class for his daughter ; and, best of all, a female official answering the questions of a roomful of persons—those, I was told, who had written letters of criticism on railway matters to the newspapers.

I remember, too, the hospitable act of the director in giving me a glass of beer and his friendly acceptance of my answer to a question as to whether Russian beer was as good as English.

Though I am not conversant with details of factory management I was not slow to realise that conditions of labour in the factory of mine-appliances did not coincide with those in England. Two sentries guarded the gate and scrutinised the passes of all those who came in and out, while two more stood watch

inside over the machinery rooms. Nearly a quarter of the workers were women, and many of them had plucked eyebrows, rouged lips and waved hair. Piece-work was the rule, but this persuasive method did not seem to prevent a general air of indolence ; the men stood about smoking, the women chattering in twos and threes. But if the slack appearance of the scene was foreign to English eyes, so, too, was the well-equipped clinic attached to the factory and the neighbouring crèche for the children of female workers. The children had just returned from their morning work and were all installed on chamber-pots, but were not, apparently, too occupied to take a keen and vociferous interest in a visit.

Kharkov relies for interest entirely on the industrial manifestations of the Five Year Plan. There are few legacies of an earlier history to delay the visitor. The Uspenski Cathedral, in the centre of the city, was built in the late eighteenth century, but when the belfry was added, in 1841, the exterior was adorned with a coat of brown and yellow stripes which has reduced the building, in these days of ecclesiastical neglect, to the tones of a shabby wasp.

Gilded crosses still stand upon the summit of its domes and from them, in the Russian manner, hang long chains, as negligently suspended as the chain of a governess's pince-nez. Under the porch, at the west end, a petrol station had been erected, and when I attempted to enter the cathedral by a side door I found some old women utilising the heating apparatus to dry their washing. They shook their heads and fell to giggling when I asked whether I might enter, and



one said that the doors were locked and that the cathedral had been closed for some months. The only church, in the centre of Kharkov, which I found open had been fitted with loud speakers and was relaying a wireless programme. On the high ridge overlooking the city I came on a building of pink and white plaster approached by a gateway and courtyard, evidently a former private house of some substance, which now served the purpose of a natural history museum. As I wandered alone through the city I came on two funerals. The first was evidently the more important. Militia-men marched slowly at the head of the *cortège*, then came a brass band playing Chopin's march, and next a group of mourners in colours and carrying wreaths, and last the white hearse, drawn by two horses. The second was much smaller, no militia-men, no band and only one horse. Somewhere I had read that only at funerals in Russia was a priest to be seen, but there was no priest here. The only attendants were two weeping women. As I walked back to my hotel a lorry-load of young soldiers drove past singing in perfect harmony.

The train to Dnieproges was crowded. It came from Moscow and was going to Sevastopol. There were soldiers bound for the south, sailors on their way to the Crimea, a family of Japanese, and, in the hard-class carriages, a tumult of peasants.

It is a Russian characteristic to observe a long-distance journey as an excursion into a kind of timeless Nirvana. From the moment of entering the train one surrenders oneself, body and mind, to the will of the driver. Night and day have no relative value ;

the bunks are lowered and remain in position for the entire journey ; one undresses partially and lies down ; sometimes one eats ; one talks or sleeps when one feels so inclined ; darkness or light have none of their usual significance ; for a space of three or four days the traveller resigns himself to a timeless existence ; and, since in ordinary life the Russian finds the division of the day into hours and minutes an irksome business, he welcomes the opportunity of escape into a world where such problems can be completely disregarded. It is perhaps in order that this innocent pleasure may be prolonged to the utmost, that the fastest speed of a Russian express never exceeds forty miles an hour, and maintains for the traveller's peace of mind a very much lower average by halting for at least half an hour at every station.

Progress, at such a speed, and in such untroubled circumstances, gives one, however, plenty of opportunity of forming close acquaintanceships with one's fellow-travellers, and, during the eight hours, most generously allotted by the People's Commissariat of Transport to cover the short distance of a hundred and fifty miles between Kharkov and Dnieproges (the former Alexandrovsk), I enjoyed a lengthy conversation with my chance companions.

There were three of them. Two were transport workers from Siberia and the third was a girl employed in a Moscow office. They were all on their way to sanatoria, in the Crimea, for a holiday. The older of the two men told me his age was sixty-seven and that he was having a month's holiday, paid for by his union. The other, who was very dark with a mass of gold stoppings in his teeth, looked about twenty-eight. He worked in a very much more remote part

than the older man, and was paid double wages. This was his first holiday for two years and he had been allotted two months. He had worked for a time under an English expert and he proudly displayed a watch which the Englishman had given him. They all insisted that I should go to Moscow for May Day and the idea of my travelling back on my tracks for two days did not seem any obstacle to them. The girl handed round slices of toast with sugar on it ; we all drank glasses of tea from the *samovar* at the end of the coach, and became very friendly. They taught me some Russian phrases and I some English. Then we discussed politics and none of them showed any unwillingness to join in. They all said they were satisfied with the régime. The younger man was a Stakhanovite and said he was entitled to special privileges. The older man told me he was not a member of the Communist Party—it was mainly for younger men—but, although all the advantages were for the young, he thought it was the best system for Russia. He said that life was very difficult for old people, but that it was getting better for all.

As to fighting, he said he detested German Fascists, and if only France and England would join with Russia there would be an end to Hitler. Russia, they all declared, did not want to fight—she had enough territory and did not need more—but that if Japan or Germany attacked, then the Russians would retaliate—now they were quite strong enough. The older man said he had been to Paris before the War and he would like to go back, but now it was impossible.

In their simple way they could not have been more courteous to me and I did my best to recollect the

charm of these three workers when, on later occasions, I had to suffer either the evangelical fervour or the feckless inefficiency of their fellow-countrymen.

### DNIEPROGES

It had been raining hard all night, and though the deluge had ceased, there was a general dampness and a grey sky on the morning I drove out to the Dnieper Dam. But, first, it is worth recording that the Director of the Restaurant [*sic*] was an enthusiast for English customs. He spoke the language well and begged me to try his jam "which is made in the proper English way." It was black-currant and excellent. That, and the fact that the Director had somehow managed to procure a coffee which bore some resemblance to the drink commonly called coffee in every country in the world except the U.S.S.R., where a strange brown beverage masquerades under that name, compensated considerably for the very unattractive sanitary arrangements.

The road to the dam was cobbled all the way, and the journey was made in a Ford car apparently fitted with wheels of iron. For a time we appeared to be driving into the open country when all at once, round a bend, I saw an impressive spectacle of chimneys, belching grey and reddened smoke, against the skyline.

We drove through the outskirts of Zaporoge, and on both sides of the road were mud cottages and wooden shacks of the most miserable kind, interspersed with an occasional wooden cinema hall, flaming with posters, till we reached the new town,

where houses and streets were in the process of formation. The houses, which were never more than three storeys high, were built of sombre grey stone and everywhere there was mud, great drifts of it. A few trees, still slim and leafless, had been planted in places where it was one day hoped to make a public garden.

The factories, which derived their power from the dam, stood some way back from the road. Closer at hand was a black tangle of wires and posts and square beds of transformers. The road came to a level crossing, and it seemed surprising (but very Russian) to see, in the midst of such progress, a peasant woman, her head bound in a handkerchief, come out to raise the wooden pole.

And there on the right was the broad, flat river, lying placid and lake-like above submerged villages and rocks and, immediately below me, the convex wall of the dam. A great panache of spray soared continually upwards from two or three open sluices, while down the iron walls of the closed gates ran a thin brown trickle. Planted in the water like the square stone feet of an Egyptian mummy were the great buttresses of the dam, and, to one side, crouched low on the water, was the power-house of pale pink stone. There was no human movement over the entire scene ; only the belching smoke of the factories and the continuous panache of spray.

We motored over the dam and descended the road to the power-house. Barbed wire, a triple sentry guard, and a battery of searchlights protected the power-house from the incursion of *Saboteurs*. A solitary sentry stalked among the transformers. I was forbidden to photograph. Yet within the dynamo-house

a group of workers squatted about smoking and laughing, and untidy women in dirty slippers plopped across the tiled floors. Nine squat grey dynamos filled the surface of the hall, and the air with their humming. On the river-side were long windows overlooking the great expanse of water swirling away from the turbines and surging towards the sea. At the far end of the hall a small balcony looked directly on to the dam and down the river. It was a restless landscape, bare of any trees. Rocks jutted from the water, and the distant banks were whitened in a hundred places as the river splashed against them and passed on, while on either shore was a disorderly collection of buildings and pylons, sudden jets of smoke, and a network of posts and cables.

On the way back I asked to be shown over the aluminium works which are run by electricity, but after a lengthy wait, while my guide sought permission, I was informed that the factory was now closed to all foreigners. Skidding in every direction over the black mud which covered the main road we drove back to Zaparoge.

As the train was not due to leave until late at night I had some hours at my disposal and, since the rain had begun again with great severity, I was considering the question of how these should be most usefully spent, when the door of my bedroom opened and in came a smiling young man who introduced himself as a representative of *Red Zaparoge*, seeking an interview. Without more ado he removed his goloshes and, grinning all over his face, put a series of questions in halting German. When I offered him a Player he cried : " Tak ! Tak !" and rolled on my bed with delight, evincing the same pleasure each time I

replied to his questions in my, equally halting, German.

“How did I find the dam? Was it not great, beautiful, colossal? There were no such dams to be seen in England, were there?”

“No,” I answered, “since there were no such rivers as the Dnieper.”

“But in England, there were many strikes, were there not, and often revolts in the Navy? When would the revolution come, and had I seen the new Metro in Moscow?”

When we came to the question of my own books and the problem of translating their titles into Russian his laughter knew no bounds; and, sitting on my bed, he rocked backwards and forwards with delight.

When he had gone I sat at my window and watched a very old man in a round fur cap and a sheepskin coat walking round and round the little public garden opposite the hotel. For three hours, until it got dark, the same old man walked very slowly round that garden, quite alone, keeping just the same pace and only stopping from time to time to stare for a few minutes at a wall and then move on. It was the spirit of the old Russia incarnate and I felt sure that if he had spoken his thoughts aloud his voice would have echoed the words of Turgenev.

Watching from my window, later in the afternoon, I heard a band approaching and presently saw a funeral coming into sight. The body lay in an open coffin and at the street corner the procession halted while the coffin was put down from the hearse and a large crowd collected to gaze down on it. Most of the mourners wore red caps, but at the end of the procession came a little cart in which sat two women

wearing black, and drawn by a horse in black funeral trappings. When they had passed on my attention was diverted by the canned shouts and fusillade from the talkie cinema opposite. It was showing a film of the early days of the Revolution. "We from Cronstadt." I went in for a short time to be regaled by a crude story of the Civil War, of Red soldiers fighting the White Army, and of the Red victory. The more bloodthirsty the attack, the wilder was the applause of the audience, and many joined in with the singing when the Internationale was dinned out of the loud-speaker at the close.

I wandered, just as it was getting dark, through the drab streets of the little whitewashed town. Already the sameness of the goods displayed in the windows of each place I had visited was beginning to depress me, and here I saw what I had not yet seen in Russia and was only to see on three other occasions during my journey, a queue, this time for shoes. The shoes were of the cheapest variety of rubber and canvas, but nevertheless there were fifty or sixty men and women waiting their turn to purchase. Incidentally, I noticed that no other article of clothing attracted the attention of the passer-by more than my own footwear.

When the time came for me to leave, and I was obediently waiting in the hall with my luggage at the hour appointed, it was discovered that the driver of the car which was to take me to the station was nowhere to be found, was indeed said to have gone home and to bed. I asked whether it would not be possible to obtain another car and was informed that there was not a single other taxi in the town. It seemed an incongruous admission from a place which had succeeded at harnessing a river. As the time



drew nearer to the train's departure, all my unfortunate guide could do was to invoke her God, which seemed to me an inappropriate call for a thoroughgoing Communist. I was on the point of making my way to the nearest tram-stop when a lorry was sighted, hailed, and instructed to drive me to the station, which it proceeded to do with surprisingly little demur.

The train, when it arrived, was, of course, full to overflowing, and the only place available was in a hard-class carriage already occupied by five peasants in a state of semi-undress. Considerable surprise was expressed when I besought other accommodation for the night journey, and it was at length suggested that a sleeping berth would become vacant at 2 a.m. and, meanwhile, I might shelter in the conductor's coupé, an offer which I gratefully accepted. When I finally got to bed I was too weary to discover, until the morning, that the occupant of the top berth was a member of the opposite sex.

#### IV

### CRIMEA

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#### SEVASTOPOL

AT LAST I HAD REACHED THE SOUTH AND THE Southern Spring. In the bright morning sunshine, as I looked from the train window, I could see blossoming fruit trees and clear sunny streams. The rain and the grim evidence of industrial endeavour seemed to have been left far behind. The train halted at a small station which I saw was labelled : " Alma," and soon afterwards we left the mountain and reached Sevastopol and the sea.

Standing in the corridor of the sleeping-car, and looking round me as the train drew in at the white sunlit station, there was nothing, to judge from my travelling companions, to tell me that I was not arriving in a Paris express at some Riviera resort. By me stood a young woman in a smart dark blue costume which must have come from abroad, and a round white hat in the latest style, while she carried a dressing-case labelled : "*Berengaria* State Room." The men wore well-cut double-breasted suits and carried overcoats. The only distinctive Russian note was that the majority wore caps.

I supposed that they must belong to the highest paid class of engineers or high officials, but I could hardly reconcile the fact of their obviously superior mode of

living with the picture which I had formed outside Russia of a country where all were equal, nor with the knowledge that further up the train there were six peasants at least lodged in one hard-class compartment.

I had planned to spend two or three days in Sevastopol, intending to visit the Greek remains at Chersonese and the sites of the Crimean battlefields. But when, at the hotel, I announced my intentions, they were not sympathetically received. Chersonese was under excavation I was informed, and though I might, if I wished, pay twenty-five shillings to drive to the entrance, I should not be allowed inside. As to visiting the battlefields, it might be possible to hire a car, but it would not be cheap, not at all cheap ; in fact, it would be very expensive, and it was doubtful whether a serviceable guide could be obtained. After all, it all happened so long ago. . . .

The reasons for the discouragement of tourists were not far to seek. They roared continually overhead and filled the streets, dressed in smart white uniforms. Sevastopol is the chief southern base of the Soviet Navy—and though I was sternly forbidden to take any photographs within a radius of 30 kilometres I could not help observing four cruisers lying in the harbour. Despite the repressive methods of the citizens I found Sevastopol a gay and charming town. Its décor, on that sunny spring day, was almosy reminiscent of a Dufy. A gateway flanked by white Ionic pillars gave entrance to a broad flight of steps leading down to the blue waters, and up and down this stairway, beneath the white acacia trees, moved the sailors in their white uniforms. Naval detachments, with streamers fluttering behind their caps, marched through the streets,

and somewhere across the harbour a band was playing.

From Malakoff Hill, where the small fortress repeatedly assailed by the French and only finally captured by General Pelissier in August, 1855, is still standing, I looked down on the town and out to sea.

Judging from the panoramic view in the Town Museum the view from the Malakoff has changed very little since the days of the war. On three sides stretches the treeless, limestone plain, broken up in places with broad shallow valleys. The town itself, with its square white houses and red roofs, must have been rebuilt in almost identical style, for only fourteen houses survived the end of the siege. Thyme grew thickly on the slopes of the hill and filled the air with its scent. I seemed to have left the Plan at a distance.

But in the museum I heard an echo of its standard tones when the guide, in showing me an artist's imaginary rendering of the field of war, was punctilious to point out that it was the officer to whom the priest was giving unction, not the private soldier dying at his side.

## YALTA

As we passed the village of Balaclava, on the way from Sevastopol to Yalta, I looked in vain for the nook in the hills once known as "Miss Nightingale's Seat." The Valley of Death, a narrow opening in the hills leading to the sea, I did identify, though I noticed that it was blocked by a smoking factory, the function of which, I heard, was to tin fish. Doubtless the Plan

has found a similar use for the site of Miss Nightingale's nook, though it is always possible that her name has been perpetuated as that of an early feminist who was misguided enough by the opium of religion to succour the forces of capitalism in an imperialist war of aggression.

Climbing all the time, the road crosses the barren country-side, passing an occasional Tartar village of obvious poverty, until it passes through a tunnel—the Baidar Gate—blasted in the rock ; and the luxuriant shores of the Crimean coast, suddenly and unexpected in their luxuriance, lie before you. Sheer below stretches the green Black Sea, and half-way down to it, on the twisting road, stands a garish building of Oriental appearance. This was formerly a Greek Catholic church, but it has now been converted into a restaurant and conducts a brisk trade with travellers on the road. Two white-coated barmen dispense drinks from a counter laden with intriguing bottles on the site of the former sanctuary, and customers are seated at little tables in what was once the body of the church. There is a fine view from the terrace, and drinks, if one prefers it, may be served outside.

Once through the Baidar Gate the coast road to Yalta may be compared to the Corniche, without the Savon Cadum and the resorts of sophisticated *villeggiatura*. To one side is a high and severe range of mountains, and on the other is the sea, while between the two are pine-forests, vineyards and the large estates which formerly belonged to the great families of Imperial Russia.

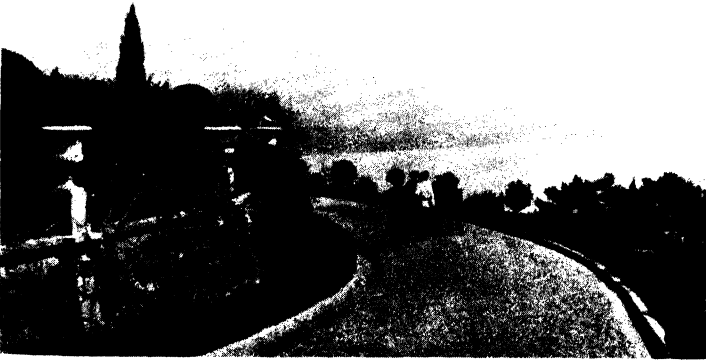
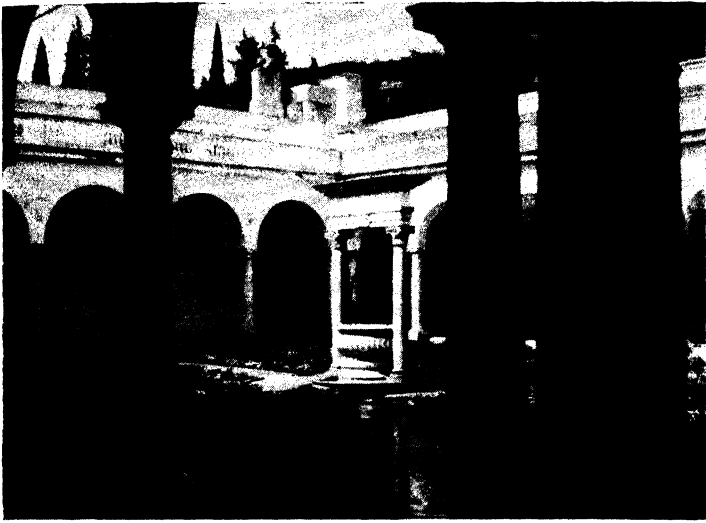
Yalta itself, which faces a small bay, was once the

Russian Cannes. To-day it is the playground of the proletariat, and the appearance of the town has suffered, I think, from the reversal of its fortunes. The striped awnings of the once-elegant little shops along the sea front are tattered and faded, and the shop windows, which in pre-Revolution days must have displayed fashionable trifles expensive enough for the most extravagant aristocracy in the world, are now filled with a different range of goods altogether (and what a small range it is), for quite another type of customer. In place of icing and *confiserie* there are rock buns and biscuits ; and instead of scarves from Paris, and jewellery, and the best English tweed, there are highly-tinted views of Yalta encrusted with shells, or a pair of hearts entwined, bearing an inscription equivalent to "A Present from Yalta."

And up and down the front stroll the workers of the Soviet Union, linking arms with their girls, wearing comic round caps, boating in the harbour, bathing, and enjoying themselves, in fact, just as the people do at any of our own popular resorts. One does not grudge them their enjoyment and it is certain that holidays in the Soviet Union are well earned. But one cannot help regretting, for æsthetic reasons, the passing of an exclusiveness which was, at any rate, picturesque for communal enjoyment in its cruder form by citizens of uniform tastes. Exclusiveness is an object at which we are inclined to sneer until we are denied the opportunity of achieving it. Then it becomes eminently desirable. At Yalta I could only wish for the return of the vanished world of landaus and visiting cards, feather boas and high, ridiculous coiffures, grand-duchess's tea-parties and a band playing a Waldteufel waltz. Its pink and white villas,

and its rococo bandstand, seemed an ill-chosen, a tragically ill-chosen, back-cloth for the workers' playground.

The last Tsar's villa, at Livadia, a mile or two out of Yalta, is now used as a holiday home for the workers, as are most of the other large villas along the coast. It is a square white building erected in the early years of this century in the Edwardian Italian style. The private chapel of the Imperial Family has been turned into a cloak-room for hats and coats, and in the front hall the comrades were enjoying a fox-trot lesson to a gramophone. Upstairs was the Tsar's study, panelled in dark wood, and now used as a dormitory, while the Tsarina's boudoir, close by, was similarly converted and contained ten iron bedsteads. None of the original furniture and pictures remained ; indeed, except for the bedsteads and some uncompromising wooden chairs and trestle-tables in the communal dining-room, there appeared to be very little furniture of any kind, and the whole house was tidy and clean. By far the most pleasant part of Livadia was its garden, sloping down to the sea, and laid out in the manner of an Italian garden, with cypresses and terraces and marble fountains and water troughs. But the art of gardening in Russia seems to have perished with the Tsar. Here, except for the wistaria which grew in profusion on every wall, the flowers were either daisies or wallflowers, an unenterprising choice, and the lawns were badly in need of the mower. It was the sun and the sea and the warmth of the southern Spring which made the gardens so agreeable. One could almost imagine oneself on the Côte d'Azur until one turned and beheld the comrades lying about on the grass, with



#### LIVADIA

*The last Tsar's villa, now used as a holiday home for workers.*





their handkerchiefs over their eyes, in the Margate manner.

It must have been to Livadia that Mark Twain and the other Innocents came, when they landed at Yalta from "the very beautiful and substantial side-wheel steamship *Quaker City*," on the Great Pleasure Excursion of 1867, to be received by the Emperor Alexander II. In those days the Tsar resided in the Moorish villa which stands close to the newer building.

The party of New Yorkers, relates Mark Twain, "formed a circle under the trees before the door, for there was no one room in the house able to accommodate our three-score persons comfortably and in a few minutes the Imperial family came out bowing and smiling, and stood in our midst."

"The Emperor," he notes, "wore a cap, frock coat and pantaloons. . . . No costume could be less ostentatious. He is very tall and spare, and a determined-looking man, though a very pleasant-looking one, nevertheless. It is easy to see he is kind and affectionate. There is something very noble in his expression when his cap is off. There is none of that cunning in his eye that one of us noticed in Louis Napoleon's." (Even in 1867 the visitors from the New World had not omitted a visit to Paris.)

"The Empress and the little Grand Duchess wore simple suits of foulard (or foulard silk, I don't know which is proper) with a small blue spot in it; the dresses were trimmed with blue; both ladies wore broad blue sashes about their waists; linen collars and clerical ties of muslin; low-crowned straw-hats trimmed with blue velvet; parasols and flesh-

coloured gloves. The Grand Duchess," he notes, "had no heels on her shoes."

An address was read on the Innocents' behalf which the Emperor "bore with unflinching fortitude," and "said he was very much pleased to see us, especially as such friendly relations existed between Russia and the United States. The Empress said the Americans were favourites in Russia, and she hoped the Russians were similarly regarded in America."

These formalities concluded, the Innocents were conducted over the Imperial mansion by the Emperor and his family. "They made no charge. They seemed to take a real pleasure in it," comments Mark Twain. "We spent half an hour idling through the palace, admiring the cosy apartments and the rich but eminently home-like appointments of the place, and then the Imperial Family bade our party a kind good-bye, and proceeded to count the spoons."

"I would as soon have thought of being cheerful in Abraham's bosom as in the palace of an Emperor," he writes at the conclusion of the visit. "I supposed that Emperors were terrible people. I thought they never did anything but wear magnificent crowns and red velvet dressing-gowns with dabs of wool sewed on them in spots, and sat on thrones and scowl at the flunkies and the people in the *parquette*, and order Dukes and Duchesses off to execution. I find, however, that when one is so fortunate as to get behind the scenes and see them at home and in the privacy of their firesides, they are strangely like common mortals. They are pleasanter to look upon than they are in their theatrical aspect. It seems to come as natural to them to dress and eat like other people as it is to put a friend's cedar pencil in your pocket

when you are done using it. But I can never have any confidence in the tinsel kings of the theatre after this. It will be a great loss. I used to take such a thrilling pleasure in them. But, hereafter, I will turn me sadly away and say : ' This does not answer—this isn't the style of king I am acquainted with.' ”

Through the oak-tree groves and the beech woods I drove to visit some of the other summer villas which, in Mark Twain's words, “ bud out here and there like flowers through the mass of green foliage ”—rather exotic flowers, one might add—for the ruling class of old Russia had various ideas about the architecture of their homes, and their creations form a bizarre collection.

There was Massandra, for example, built in 1901 for Alexander III in the style of a seventeenth-century French château, of grey stone, surmounted by the gilded double eagle and now used as a sanatorium for those suffering from diseases of the chest. I was not permitted to go inside as a batch of patients were shortly expected and renovations were in progress (this fact explained the presence of four china lavatory seats which occupied a prominent position by the front door and also, I supposed, the pile of beer bottles and waste paper on the parquet floor of the former Imperial drawing-room which I caught sight of through the window). But I strolled through the lovely park and from two rocky boulders, known respectively as “ Hurrah ” and “ Bravo,” obtained a lovely view of Yalta and the sea.

Not far away, in a hill-side cavern, were the Imperial wine cellars. The contents have now been

nationalised by the State and I was informed that the best of the old vintage, far from being enjoyed by the people, is kept for analysis by the State chemists. That, I suppose, is the fate reserved for the bottles of brandy bearing the Imperial coat of arms which, I noticed, had been laid down in 1895, the year of the last Tsar's coronation. But the present Government is, I was glad to hear, full of encouragement to the production of wine, and the wines of Massandra are supplied all over the Union and exported abroad. I spent a pleasant hour tasting Soviet burgundy, tokay, muscatel and port, and was scarcely surprised to read the glowing and spirited testimonials in the visitors' book of other samplers. One, I noticed, had been bold enough to remark that he found : "The Five Bottle Plan a cuter notion than the Five Year Plan." Others, on the contrary, had been fired to inscribe lengthy pæans in the rosiest, most eulogistic, tones of everything Russian. But their somewhat rambling style and frequently straying tenses suggested that these testimonies were not of very great account in the light of sober truth.

Another surprising architectural specimen was the Moorish château of the Grand-Duke Peter Nikolayevitch, a white-domed construction, dazzling in the sun, and surrounded by a garden overlooking the sea and planted with cypresses and sweet-scented shrubs. The gravel was raked, the windows polished, and the paint in such excellent trim that one was inclined to imagine that "the family" were simply away on a visit and would soon return for the summer. It was only the sight of a row of wooden couches for the use of tubercular patients which recalled one to the true state of affairs.

But the most remarkable in appearance of all the villas in the Crimea was undoubtedly Alupka, the former residence of the noble family of Vorontzov. This elaborate construction was built in 1837, from the design of the English architect, Edward Blore, who chose to combine the two styles of Early Victorian Gothic with the Moorish. Thus, while the north façade resembles Abbotsford, the south is reminiscent of the Alhambra, and the interior is decorated alternatively with pitch-pine and texts from the Koran.

I was escorted over this polygenic mansion by a young Russian who strongly resembled my idea of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov. He wore a full cap with strap and wide brim, a greasy black gabardine suit, and, though he could not have been more than twenty-five, his cadaverous and bony face carried a straggling beard and whiskers.

Furniture, pertaining to the years of its building, remained in the house as well as a quantity of pictures with high-sounding ascriptions, and when I asked my guide why it had not been converted into a sanatorium his answer was that the house was considered "too beautiful to be touched." His opinion was no doubt influenced by a quotation from Lenin hanging on the wall which, said the young man, he could hardly translate adequately—the words were too beautiful—but the gist was that the works of the past must be taken into account when forming the culture of the future. If, however, Alupka was regarded as an example of the unfortunate taste of the mid-nineteenth-century Russian bourgeoisie, then there was certainly reason for its preservation.

A Vorontzov had been Russian ambassador in

London and was clearly an admirer of things English. His portrait and that of his wife, both by Lawrence, hung in the dining-room and in the library were many copies of the *Quarterly Review* and a bust of Pitt.

Among the acquisitions of an obviously later period were a series of crude drawings illustrating the use of the knout in connection with the unhappy peasantry of a feudal landlord. There was also a picture representing, of all curious subjects, a fashionable Moscow actress suckling a dog. This, of course, exemplified the depravity of the upper classes.

Last, my attention was directed to an object in the dining-room, which my guide, with appropriate implication, informed me was a champagne bath. I craned eagerly forward for a sight of so rare a specimen of furniture, and was disappointed to see that it was no more than a lead-lined wine-cooler of Victorian dimensions.

Outside, my guide conducted me rather listlessly round the garden. At his suggestion we sat ourselves down on some boulders until we were turned off by a gang of comrade gardeners who required them to fringe a small pond. My guide, smiling rather wanly through his beard, said that that was typical of Russia's modern energy. Nothing stood still, nor could anyone sit down, for a moment; there was always construction going on, always great construction. He also enquired whether I had any English cigarettes on me.

There was one house in the Crimea, small, white-washed and quite unpretentious, to which a visit gave

me more enjoyment than all the others put together. It lay almost outside Yalta, on the road to the mountains, and was indeed so inconspicuous that if my eyes had not been attracted by the name-plate on the door I should have passed by it altogether. For the name engraved on the brass plate was that of "A. Chekhov." He lived there for six years, from 1898-1904, and it was here that he wrote *The Cherry Orchard* and the last half of *The Three Sisters*.

The Russians, with their peculiar talent for this type of embalment, have preserved the house intact exactly as it was in Chekhov's day, from the empty medicine bottles in his bedroom to the unopened letters on his writing-table. It affords a complete picture of the man's background and conjures up a world of vanished people.

Sprays of bamboo were clumped on the faded wallpaper of his sitting-room, and between and beneath hung innumerable photographs of actors and actresses and producers, Stanislavski, Nemirovitch-Danchenko, Chaliapin, Meyerhold ; many of the photographs, brown and fading, inscribed "St. Petersburg" and scrawled with words of homage in French. In a little recess by his writing desk was a pastel of a cherry orchard in full blossom, and on the desk itself a collection of little elephants, and three piglets riding on the back of a sow.

His bedroom was adjoining, and by the bedside was a table on which he used to work when he was ill. A four-branched candlestick, with a long green shade, stood on it, and pen and pencils were laid out. An icon hung in a corner, there was his hat-box and a calendar for 1904.

In the house, on that late afternoon in spring, one



seemed to have come again to a country of recognisable features, from a land where manners and people still seemed crude, fantastic and a little absurd. So much was difficult to take quite seriously ; values and a sense of judgment were not yet adjusted ; the statements of men and women seemed crude and unexpected ; yet, as in a dream, one accepted them and passed on. But here one might imagine voices rising and falling in the accustomed manner. There, on that sofa, a woman would sit ; on the cretonned chair, close by, a man. There would be time, opportunity, inclination for talk, discussion, raillery.

A phrase would be noted, considered and brought alive again for the audiences of Moscow. There would be time, unconsidered time, unorganised time, on the long summer evenings, with music coming up the valley from the harbour, to reflect on the queer, unnoticed, murmurs of the soul ; time to catch and translate them. Here, on the walls, on the writing table, there was evidence of the period of such deliberation, of a period now gone, perhaps, for ever. Beyond the walls there is talk, indeed, but not discussion, and words are employed to construe the visible world, not the world half-seen and only guessed at. Eyes are turned forward, not now within. In the new world what use is conjecture when the way of living is determined ? “ *Nous ne lisons plus la littérature des cadences,*” was the simple reply of a Soviet author when I asked him his opinion of Chekhov. It was understandable, in the new Russia.

Not the least pleasant feature of the house was the elderly woman who acted as caretaker. If I said that she had the manners of the old régime I might be doing her an injustice in the opinion of modern



YALTA

(i) *Chekhov's house.*

(ii) *On board the Black Sea steamer.*



Russia. I will only remark that her quiet voice and gentle bearing seemed to make her exactly the right person to guide one through these relics of the past. She could remember Chekhov clearly and told me of Tolstoi's visits to the house and of the long games of patience in which they would both indulge.

Below the windows of the house was a small, walled garden, delicious with the scent of wallflowers and white lilac, and close against the house stood a tall thick cypress planted by Chekhov's sister the year he died. But, most remarkable of all, was that on the side of the opposite hill, across the narrow valley, and visible from every window of the house, was an orchard of cherry-trees abundant with white blossom.

In the hotel I had made friends with Lance, the American boy. He was a Jew and fine-looking, in a carved, sallow way, with a tangle of black hair and a curious, quiet preoccupied kind of voice and a trick of looking straight before him as he talked.

One day we went for a long day's walk up into the mountains. We left the town and the villas right behind us and found ourselves walking quite alone through a little track in the black pine-woods. Once we lost our way (we were making for the waterfalls of Utchan Su) and after a bit came to a clearing and a cottage. A man came out of the cottage, and when we asked him to direct us he tore a scrap of wallpaper off the wall and drew us a little plan. Then he asked us what country we came from, and when we told him America and England he said, could the Englishman understand the American's language. I said yes ; they were almost the same. And the man

laughed a lot and said that was very funny : one was such a big country and the other such a small one, and they were so far apart. He said his brother was learning a language at school, but he thought it was American they were teaching him, not English. He was still laughing when we looked back and saw him standing in the clearing before his cottage.

After that, the trees got less thick and there were big patches of sunshine on the ground. It was very slippery on the pine-needles, and very quiet. I didn't hear a sound ; not even a bird. About two o'clock we got out of the tree-line and up against the rocky side of the mountains. But still we didn't see any sign of the waterfall.

Then Lance said he thought he could hear the sound of it, and we paused quite still for a minute or two to listen. Lance was quite right. From not very far away there was a low continuous murmur. We walked on under the high afternoon sun. Both of us had got very thirsty, and when we reached a woodman's cottage we stopped to ask the woman inside whether she had any boiled water to drink. She said she hadn't, but told us the falls were only a short distance away and we might drink there. We had scarcely left her when a child from the cottage came running after us and held out in his hand a glass. He came with us to where we could drink and carried the glass back with him. It was a touching piece of kindness.

We rested a little by the pool at the foot of the falls, which tumbled over a rock ledge 300 feet above our heads, and Lance bathed his face and said it was grand, simply grand.

Then we scrambled up over the slithering shale to

the highest ridge beside the rock ledge. There was a long, long view over the smooth tops of the pines away to Yalta and the sea.

Both of us felt glowing and relaxed, as one does after a long climb in the sun.

Lance talked away in his quiet preoccupied voice. He was twenty, just down from high school, and on a trip abroad before going back to the States and his father's business. He said that because he was a Jew he felt a kind of kinship with the old world, and because he guessed something was wrong with it he'd come over to see what that thing was. Before he came over he said he thought Europe was dying from the capitalist system and that it must adopt communism or just fade out altogether. Now, although he was still certain about the dying part of it, he wasn't so sure about the communist side, since he'd come to Russia.

He said he'd gone to Moscow with some idea of getting a job in the theatre, with the Jewish company perhaps. But he was right through with the place. Nobody bothered about him, nobody would even have him come to see them. And it wasn't the country of equals he'd pictured to himself and hoped for. Why, in Moscow he'd seen commissars driving about alone in Rolls-Royces, with a man to drive them, while the rest of the people tramped or fought for a place in the trams. One day, he said, he'd hailed one of the Rolls, just to see what happened, and the man had driven right on. Why, in the States one guy helped another guy ; but it didn't seem as though that philosophy held good in Russia, for all their talk.

We sat looking out towards the sea. The sun was still pretty high.

Presently Lance said he thought that all the old countries in Europe would set to and have a war and that was how it would all end. America would keep out of it this time. Civilisation in Europe was dying. Communism wasn't the solution, nor fascism. They were just symptoms of the death-struggle which was going to put an end to European civilisation. For two thousand years Europe had been supreme. Now it was America which was going to lead the world.

We both of us agreed, one coming from the New World and the other from the Old, that it was hard to be young at such a time. All our lives, since we could either of us remember, there had been stress, false renewals of hope, dangers of war, uncertainty. We had both come to Russia with a quest. He was turning back, disillusioned ; I was still unsatisfied. I said I thought that if one could rid Europe of nationalism and direct those separate energies into one single channel, which I believed might be some form of communism, there was still vigour enough in Europe to carry it on.

He smiled and said if two thousand years hadn't taught neighbours not to fight each other, then he didn't think they had any right to regard themselves as civilised any longer.

Walking back to Yalta it was hard to believe that one was in a land on which the eyes of half the world were fixed for the solution of a new way of living. There were whitewashed farm-houses with cypresses growing before them. Peasants were working in the fields, animals moved peacefully across the land. Trees of blossom showed sudden and abundant against the sombre earth. Below us a sailing-boat

moved serenely into harbour. Here, one would have said, was a southern people occupied with spring in almost the same manner as the Greek colonists who farmed the same land in the days of Pericles. There was respite in the thought and a certain immediate comfort.

They were good days, those in the Crimea, and as I watched the signs of an unfolding spring I recognised a link with Greece and Italy and my heart beat the faster. There was not, it was true, the severe magnificence of Greece nor the richness and classicism of Italy, but there was the blossom and the olive-skinned scrofulous children, and white dusty roads leading into the mountains, and the clear atmosphere which fills the South early in the year.

It was the change of weather and the Czechoslovakian pedagogues which, together, sent me travelling on again. I woke up one morning to find the mountains hidden by cloud and mist and slanting sheets of rain pitting the grey sea. There was nothing for it but to go to a cinema, and the only film to be seen in Yalta was a Soviet propaganda picture about Red Army heroism in the Caucasus. It may have been edifying in sentiment, but it was highly boring in practice. I was soon sloshing through the muddy streets again.

Over a Gothic doorway was carved : DEO ET IMMACULATÆ DE GENETRICI MARIÆ SACRUM, but inside a mixed class of young things was energetically undergoing a round of physical jerks. Up on a hill outside the town I came on another church. It was locked ; but, peering in through a broken pane, I could see it



was still in use. Icons hung on the walls, candles were in the sconces and I could smell the faint musty odour of incense. But the stones in the churchyard had all been broken or turned over and hens were scratching about among the damp debris. Some children were running barefoot in the mud, and just inside the door of one of the poorer houses I saw an old woman with pure Mongolian features smoking a long, white clay pipe.

In this country of strange contrasts I noticed, on that wet afternoon, another sight which seemed to have significance. A woman in a shabby tailor-made costume was driving a pig and a pigling through one of the main streets ; and just behind her came another woman, again not in peasant's clothes, carrying a kid under her arm as women carry hand-bags. When the other passers-by saw the couple they all smiled and laughed, as if to show how uncivilised the women were. They laughed more loudly still when the kid emitted a stream all down the woman's coat, which she did not at first notice, and even when she did appear very unconcerned about it.

The fifty Czecho-Slovakian pedagogues (the austere Russian version indicated that they were of the teaching profession) were making a whirlwind tour of the Soviet Union, and when they arrived at Yalta completely monopolised the hotel. Except for a number of Russian families Lance and I had been undisturbed. But the pedagogues soon made their presence felt. Doors of apartments, which fulfilled a vital and strictly functional purpose, were permanently bolted. The white-tiled bathroom, built in spacious Tsarist days, of which I had, owing to the accommodating habits of the Russians, enjoyed the sole use, was now hardly

won and, once gained, found to contain the drying portions of the pedagogic underwear.

In the dining-room the requirements of the pedagogues were disastrously unforeseen. Meals which, in the leisurely Russian manner, customarily took a mere hour and a half were now drawn out into sittings of three hours at least. Loudly though the elderly sextet, which formed the hotel orchestra, rendered selections from *Tannhäuser*, the imprecations, the despair, of the pedagogues rose louder still. It was definitely time to leave.

The evening of my departure, wishing to mark my gratitude to the proprietor for a pleasant stay, I presented him with a phial of iodine, a commodity hard to obtain in the U.S.S.R. This he accepted with gratitude, saying he should use it against the bites of gnats (of which in summer they had a great number) and remember me at each application. Then, knowing I came from London, he asked with a tiny, but faithfully suppressed, sigh whether the Trocadero was still in existence ; he had worked there before the War. Still in existence ? Fancy that, now. Fancy that. And he sighed a little once more. But Russia was becoming the greatest country in the world he said with a show of spirit. And as to Yalta, its visitors were ten times more numerous than before the Revolution. The streets were always crowded, crowded ; was it not wonderful ? I said yes, I had noticed the numbers.

At this point a ruffianly-looking youth burst in on us, declaring that I must embark immediately on the steamer which was to take me across the Black Sea, or the ship would undoubtedly leave without me. There was not a second to spare.

Thrusting a pair of nail-scissors, by way of a tip, upon a blushing but gratified chamber-maid, I was bundled into a car and driven at breakneck speed to the jetty.

Needless to say, the steamer showed no intention of an immediate departure and it was not indeed until long after midnight that I watched, from her stirring bows, the scattered lights of Yalta retreat into the distance.

## BLACK SEA

MY VOYAGE ON BOARD THE 4000-TON BLACK SEA steamer is chiefly memorable to me for the behaviour of the peasant passengers, and for Sormovo.

On every inch of the deck and in every quarter of the ship lay mounds, heaps, or bundles of peasants. All day they chattered and cracked nuts, their meals consisting of lumps of coarse brown bread and dried fish, which they procured from a little stall in the stern. They lay stretched out, men, women and children, among the enormous barrels or on top of the packing-cases containing the cargo ; the women with coloured shawls over their heads, the men in shirts, a pair of trousers and a full cap. They never seemed to rest. All night long there was a jabbering and a chattering, and a spitting, and a cracking of nuts, and a twanging of a primitive guitar ; and, continually borne in the wind, there was the odour of the dried fish. Luckily the sea was calm.

Sormovo, from being at first a ship-board acquaintance, rapidly became—for he was flatteringly forthcoming—a friend. Indeed, from the moment that he discovered I was English he scarcely left my side. He was a student of the English language and of English affairs, having a vast admiration for Sir Austen Chamberlain and for Jerome K. Jerome.

"Though if you will pardon my saying so," he remarked one day with an exquisite seriousness, "I do not hold the author of *Three Men in a Boat* (not to mention the dog !) to be so great an artist as our Anton Chekhov." With this I heartily concurred.

"Nevertheless," he said, "you have some fine writers in your country. Seton Thompson, and Jack London, and Stephen Leacock, I read them all. And then you have your Mr. Shaw. He is a humorist, indeed, yes ? "

Sormovo, aged thirty-three, was one of those mysterious "scientific workers" with which the Soviet Union seems to abound. Science, in the Russian meaning, is not, however, solely allied to physics. It implies research of every kind on every trade. Sormovo, for example, was engaged in the fish-canning industry, with his headquarters in Vladivostok ; and was now, with a grant of 3000 roubles, making a four-months' visit to the fish-canning centres in South Russia and on the Caspian. He wore a full-brimmed, white yachting cap in token, perhaps, of the sea-going character of his career.

We used to start the day by breakfasting together (Sormovo breakfasted regularly and robustly on *bœuf stroganov*) and then we would sit on the top deck, while Sormovo practised his English phrases ("To parry a thrust," was one which recurred, I remember) and gave me painstaking lessons in Russian. A loud-speaker provided us with synthetic music from Moscow, and when it played a song from a Russian opera which Sormovo recognised he would break off from his instruction and join in with a voice which was unfailingly true. Sometimes we watched the peasants in the stern performing dances of slow and simple

step, to the accompaniment of rhythmic clapping and the plucked notes of the primitive guitar. A party of commissars' wives, who were travelling first-class, would lean over the railings of the top deck and throw down sweets to the peasant children or point out to one another particular characters among the mounds in the stern.

There was also a jazz-band on board which occupied the only saloon and locked itself in (together with any other unfortunate passengers who might be caught there reading) for hours at a time while it practised its rather limited repertoire. The band was on its way to perform, during the summer season, at Batum (I had never imagined Batum as a place which had a season ; nor, indeed, when I saw it, did it fill my picture of a holiday watering-place), and was in charge of a young German. He had been driven from Germany because of his non-Aryan blood (though, as he said apologetically : "It does not show in my face") and had become a Russian citizen. But life was very difficult. He spoke little Russian and he found their cities uncivilised. ("Ach Munchen !—that is a civilised city, a city for artists and musicians.") As to the future he did not know. . . . He surprised me by talking of Hitler with no bitterness. He seemed to accept his fate and said he would live the life of a tzigane. Perhaps Jews feel that way. But he seemed a lonely, homeless person.

The steamer made frequent and lengthy stops at various ports along the coast (one night we ran into fog and the engines were shut off altogether, while the ship rolled about in the open sea to the melancholy braying of the fog-horn), and exchanged one horde of peasants for another and one consignment of packing-

cases and barrels for another shipment apparently identical.

When the calls were made during the daytime Sormovo and I would land and take brisk and rather aimless walks. There was Novorossisk, for example, which we reached early one evening. This is one of the most important of the Black Sea ports and had evidently been greatly developed lately. It lay spread out on the hills of a wide bay and consisted of a great many new barrack-like buildings, a huge cement factory and a vast dun-coloured grain elevator, said to be the largest in the world.

The town was quite without interest to the casual visitor, but Sormovo and I landed to take our customary exercise. There were the usual flamboyant pre-Revolution buildings, two or three stories high, streaked with rust running from the iron roofs, and the same range of goods in the shops as I had seen elsewhere. The goods were of the rough, home-manufactured quality to which I had now become accustomed, and they were unattractively displayed ; but there appeared to be no necessities lacking and the shops were clean and well patronised. A recently opened fish-shop was decorated almost in the Prunier style with concealed lighting, living fish in decorative tanks, and the fishmonger and his assistants provided with an attractive uniform. This seemed a remarkable innovation for a remote South Russian town.

There was brilliant sun and a sparkling sea on the day we reached Sotchi, the most *élite* Russian resort on what has come to be called the Black Sea Riviera. At Sotchi Stalin maintains a summer villa, and the Riviera Hotel is the favourite playground of Red

Army officers. The mountains come steeply down to the sea, are tree-covered and backed by a higher range of snow-covered peaks. Seen from the sea (only passengers leaving the ship could go on shore) Sochi appeared small, unvulgarised and charming.

Built among the trees, and connected to the beach with a funicular railway, there was a large white modern building of glass and cement which was a rest-home for Red Army men, while close to the harbour, and equally modern in design, was the Riviera Hotel for the officers. The military *plage* was bathed in sunshine.

Gagri, which lay farther to the south, was a smaller place than Sochi, but had a more impressive position, at the foot of a deep combe running into the mountains. Gagri's chief building, which stood close to the water, was a gabled Bavarian *schloss* built by the Duke of Oldenburg in 1901 ; but not far off were some magnificent white workers' rest-homes, from which, oddly enough, came no sign of life. Perhaps it was too early in the year for the resting season.

A little party of people came on board at Gagri, including a number of youths sporting outsize button-holes of mauve lilac, and a company of bicyclists.

The bicyclists consisted of six or eight magnificent-looking young men wearing singlets and shorts, and a strapping young woman similarly attired. They told me they were workers in a Moscow factory, and because they were members of the athletic team had been allotted a longer holiday, which they were spending on a bicycling tour. They jumped about the deck with great heartiness and talked very loudly, stuffing chunks of buttered bread and hunks of meat



down their mouths as they talked. They told me their wages were 400 roubles a month each, and they seemed very satisfied with this. One showed me his camera, which was a Russian product costing 1000 roubles and an obvious adaptation of a Leica.

In the evening, when it was dark, we all sat in a group on the top deck, drinking cups of tea (the bicyclists said they were athletes and never drank anything stronger) and eating macaroons supplied by the faithful Sormovo.

I asked them what I ought to see when I got to Moscow, and they all said, at once, that I must go first to their sports stadium. Then I must see the new hotel and the Metro, which was quite certainly better than anything of the kind in London, and the Park of Rest and Culture. Then, of course, there were pictures to be seen ; and, lastly, one added, that I should go to the Lenin Mausoleum. I asked them whether they would like to come to London, and this idea, it seemed, had never struck them. One said he did not think they would be able to obtain a passport. They gave me the telephone number of their factory sports ground and begged me to telephone when I reached Moscow. We parted the best of friends.

I was anxious to see something of Sukhum, which has been chosen as the site of the projected Soviet Hollywood, but, unluckily, it was dark when we arrived there. Nevertheless, always accompanied by Sormovo, who was very anxious for me to taste a particular brand of mineral water, I landed, and in a high wind we battled our way along the little promenade. Palms waved in the darkness and unseen waves slapped against the sea-wall. A row of naked electric-light bulbs illuminated the portals of the Hotel Ritza,

and, inside, where a vigorous quartet was dispensing Massenet to three seedy individuals sitting gloomily at separate tables, we ordered a bottle of Essen-Turki water.

"Ah," said the head waiter of the Hotel Ritza, "you cannot expect to find Essen-Turki here. In Moscow, yes . . . in Moscow, almost certainly. But here, ah, no ! Not Essen-Turki."

There was beer, however, and Sormovo fell to on a dish of *bœuf stroganov*, while the band played their selection from *Thaïs* all over again.

Then, early the next day, there was Poti ; and of all the dismal places in the world Poti must surely be one of the most dismal. The steamer paid a specially protracted call upon Poti. The port of Poti comprises a concrete warehouse of angular design, as yet unfinished ; a row of poplars ; and a cement quay, against which, for some unaccountable reason (for its surface appeared quite calm), the sea lashed furiously. There are also a score of dirty one-storied buildings which form a street. Poti is not, I would say, a port with a future. It is built upon a marsh, and the townsfolk, judging by their French mustard complexions, are the victims of incessant malaria. I did not take to Poti, and even Sormovo had to admit that it was "a sad town."

The voyage was drawing to an end and on the afternoon of our arrival, at Batum, Sormovo drew me into his cabin and delivered an emotional *envoi*. He showed me photographs of his family and, as we delved into his supply of macaroons, he presented me with a photograph of himself inscribed, "In commemoration of our voyage from his friend and comrade, P. Sormovo." He was a most lovable little

man and for a long time afterwards I missed his grin and his cheerfulness. During our whole journey together neither he nor I had discussed the Soviet régime, which may seem strange to those who imagine that the modern Russia must either lament or proselytise. He appeared as a perfectly normal man travelling on business for a perfectly ordinary concern.

It was only when we bade each other good-bye, promising to write, and he remarked : " And when you read that the Japanese have crossed the frontier and bombed Vladivostok to the skies, you will know that I have gone too," that I thought of him as the citizen of a country which many people wish to destroy, their sole reason being that they abominate the system under which its people live. They forget that the country is populated with individuals who are not, in the last analysis, so very unlike themselves.

Already I was beginning to rid myself of the preconceived notion of the Russians as a race apart. To many, outside their borders, the Red Star which shines above the U.S.S.R. is credited either with infernal powers to imbue the Russian people with desire to murder and destroy, or to invest them with supernatural powers of world guidance. Now, moving and living among them, I was learning to see them as a race, with their own peculiar form of government, a hard form of government to Western European thinking, but one, none the less, which, considering their racial strains and their past history, seemed not unsuited to the people. I was, as yet, on this stage of my journey, quite undecided about the possibility of this way of living being adopted by other

peoples of the world. But I had come, at any rate, to realise one thing, which in England had not been borne in on one with sufficient force, that Russia, if its system is to teach any useful lesson, must be judged by Russian standards and not by the standards of more highly-developed States.



## PART II



## CAUCASUS

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### BATUM

ALAS, THE VIEW WHICH I AM TOLD IS REMARKABLE of the Caucasian chain and the Adzharian Mountains was hidden almost completely by ragged white clouds as we steamed into the Bay of Batum and cast anchor in Naphthe Harbour. It was fine, but drearily grey. Waves, the colour of tin, rolled up the length of the stony beach. The little gunboats lashed together in the harbour looked very like seals. Batum evidently needs sun. Its scrappy, ill-planned shore-line did not impress me. The German band leader turned up his coat-collar and made a wry grimace at me as he went down the gangway. And the hotel was unattractive in the extreme.

But the depressing atmosphere of Batum was largely alleviated by the wild enthusiasm of the young man in the Intourist service of the hotel to reveal the attractions of the place. Such a remarkable climate ! Such unique tropical gardens ! Such unrivalled tea-plantations ! and the bathing beach was unexcelled. There seemed no end to the resources of the town. Moreover, the enthusiastic young man was not unacquainted with *le confort anglais*. Hot water ? But immediately. And it came. No plug for the basin ? Tut-tut. A plug was instantly provided.



Dinner ? Preparations should instantly be made, and he would see that the band did its best.

The bustle seemed so unaccountable that I was not surprised to learn that the young man hailed from Warsaw and had only in recent years come to settle in Russia. It seemed more appropriate to Russia when a deluge of rain began to pour from the skies and, simultaneously, the electric light failed all over the hotel. Despite the many attractions of Batum I decided to leave that night, though I felt an ungrateful visitor as I broke the news to the young man. The failure of the light had reduced him to a state of crest-fallen despondency. He could do no more than explain that all the many new developments in the town had put a great strain on the electric-light works. Yes, he admitted, the light frequently failed. Nothing could be done about it. There would, one day, be a new hotel, and then all would be put to rights. Meanwhile——

But this reflection on the future evidently cheered him considerably, and by the light of a tallow candle I could see he was once more all smiles and enthusiasm.

I dined in the largish dining-room by the light of a single candle, strikingly ecclesiastical in shape and size ; and, whether or not it was under instructions from the enthusiastic young man, the band, judging from the volume of sound it produced, certainly did its best. Considering it consisted of a trio of players, none of whom were under sixty, the performance was most remarkable. I felt that the small contribution which I was required to make at the close was a wholly inadequate exchange for the energy expended by those septuagenarian musicians.

The hotel remained in darkness for the rest of the night and my train was not due to depart until 1 a.m. I sat in my bedroom reading Boswell by candlelight until it was time to start. Then, at breakneck speed, and fully an hour before the train left, I was driven through a deluge to the station.

The sleeping-car in which I had taken a berth had been placed, with remarkable foresight, next to the engine. The car was a 1913 model and shivered and shook and creaked so much that sleep was well-nigh impossible. In the morning there was sun, but no breakfast of any sort to be had. The train was passing through a smooth mountainous landscape. Fresh green poplars waved, and there was blossom.

Late in the morning we reached Tiflis and I was ushered with ceremony, but on an empty stomach, into the former Imperial waiting-room, there to endure a lengthy wait until a car, or rather *the* car, arrived to drive me to my hotel.

### TIFLIS

Tiflis at once struck me as being very much more up to date than I had imagined. I had expected, and hoped for, at least a remnant of the caftanned Persians, with dyed hair and painted finger-nails, the Tartar mullahs in green and white turbans, the veiled Mohammedan women, who thronged the town before the War, in the days of the west-bound caravans. Under the Soviet Tiflis has been firmly and, at any rate on the surface, successfully Europeanised. Of the methods of the Government and the degree of success it has achieved I shall have more to relate.

Meanwhile, the day on which I had arrived was the last of April, and the whole town was engaged in preparations for the May Day celebrations of the morrow. Scarlet banners billowed out from the façades of the larger buildings, and gigantic drawings and photographs of Stalin and the leaders had been erected the length of the main street. There was scarcely a balcony without its strip of red bunting, and busts of the prominent were swathed in the colours of revolution and placed in the windows of houses and offices. The shops and cafés were crowded with purchasers before the holiday. In my hotel, the Hotel Orient, the landings had become dormitories with encampments of iron bedsteads. There was much chattering and excitement in the air.

The celebrations began early. Loudspeakers were speaking at the tops of their voices at 6 a.m. and continued without drawing breath all day, only pausing their harangues to break into song with "O Sole Mio" and the Prize Song from the *Meistersingers*. By 7.30 a.m. the streets were already cleared and policed. Everyone was massing in another part of the town for the procession. The hotel restaurant was locked and I had the greatest difficulty in securing a cup of tea and a boiled egg.

At nine o'clock I started for the square. As the only foreign visitor to Tiflis I had been provided with a place on the tribune and a pass by which to reach it. But the militia-men guarding the empty streets busied themselves in turning me back. My pass lacked a signature; it was invalid; had I a passport? Was I really a British citizen? How long was I staying in Tiflis? For what newspaper was I correspondent? They spoke in Georgian and I had the greatest diffi-

culty in making myself understood. Finally, I reached my allotted place to find that the parade had just begun.

I stood with a handful of consuls (described in an awed whisper by my Armenian guide as "the ambassadors of Foreign Powers") to one side of a raised platform, and on the other were gathered, in a motley herd, the local leaders, wearing mackintoshes and caps. Between us was a row of chairs on which were seated the commissars' wives and families.

The Commander of the Trans-Caucasian forces was engaged in making an heroic address through a microphone to the members of the Red Army who were drawn up in the square before us. The address was a lengthy one and throughout it the officers had to stand at the salute and the men with their rifles held extended. They all wore their long, brown dressing-gown overcoats. The General was succeeded at the microphone by the Secretary of the Party, an old man with a white beard and a black raincoat. Most of the men on the Government tribune looked extremely tough, but the officers in uniform appeared a much better type and were, I supposed, mostly Russians, while the others were Georgians. Beria, of whom more later, must have been among the latter.

The band played a strain or two of the Internationale every now and then, and we, of the diplomatic tribune, all uncovered, though nobody else did.

When the speeches were over the military parade began, the men marching with a kind of trampling step and many, including the officers, having some difficulty in keeping time. After the infantry had passed we had a squadron of cavalry and field-artillery, and finally, rumbling across the square in a

cloud of blue exhaust fumes, came a column of twenty small tanks. I was disappointed that there were no aeroplanes overhead to complete the display of Circassian might.

Although I had naturally not expected to find a Trooping of the Colour precision (in which, indeed, Mr. Raymond Mortimer sees an inhumanity which he has pronounced "rather disgusting"), I must confess I was struck by the informal spirit of the participants in the military display. When, for instance, six trumpeters had performed a fanfare, they strolled giggling back to their ranks ; and if a man, marching past, recognised a friend in the crowd round the square, he would wave and cry out in the friendliest manner possible. It must be added that those on the saluting base did likewise. But, perhaps, most remarkable to English eyes, were the militia-men in white cotton gloves, white blouses and helmets, keeping the ground, who passed round packets of cigarettes and smoked heavily. One of the consuls, not to be outdone, produced a bag of toffees, which he distributed to his colleagues.

When the military part of the programme ended (it lasted for over an hour and a half), and the last soldier had left the square, a band of sweepers, wearing white aprons and carrying brooms, advanced and swept away the dung and other relics of the march past. The rain, which had drizzled intermittently throughout the morning, now turned to a downpour, and I should have been soaked had not a kindly commissar's wife offered me the shelter of her umbrella.

But the programme continued without interruption. Some young men and women, in white shorts and



TIFLIS  
*May Day celebrations.*



singlets, drenched to the skin, performed physical jerks, undaunted by the weather, to be followed by a display of bayonet-fighting to music by cadets.

A short pause followed and there then surged forward the head of the people's procession carrying a mass of red banners and bunches of dripping mauve lilac. There were hundreds and hundreds of them. Each factory and organisation had large deputations and many bore diagrams and statistics showing their successful completion of figures of the Plan. Women marched, children marched, old and young all marched together and each carried either a flag or a spray of lilac or a little stick bearing a portrait of their favourite leader, whoever he might be.

Interspersed with the crowd was a battle of flowers' element. Decorated lorries bore *tableaux vivants* illustrating progress in bakeries, in schools, or on the railway, and a great globe of the world, showing the extent of the U.S.S.R., lumbered past, surrounded by persons attired in the various national costumes.

The procession seemed to have no end. There were deputations of foresters, of parachute jumpers, of Stakhanovites, of Cossacks in black tunics and round fur caps, of artists, actors and musicians ; and, high above the heads of the marching crowds, representations of Lenin, Engels and the bearded Karl Marx, made unsteady progress. And all the time the rain descended in torrents. The procession was still passing when I returned to my hotel after four hours in the square.

For the rest of the day there was nothing whatever to do. The rain continued to descend in torrents. Dancing was to have taken place in the evening, but at the scene of the festivities there were only a few



groups of damp and dejected comrades with wilting bunches of lilac and lilies-of-the-valley clutched in their hands. Later, "illuminations" had been promised, and these duly took place, but they struck me as being a little primitive, taking the form, in fact (since flood-lighting has not yet reached Tiflis), of a circle of electric-light bulbs, daubed red, round the portrait of a revolutionary, lighting up his features in a murky and melodramatic manner. The loud-speakers continued far into the night.

Next day was again a holiday and the ordinary traffic of life remained at a standstill. When I enquired as to how the people would spend the day I was informed: "Oh, walk about and booze." It was, therefore, hardly a fair occasion to begin to study the customs of the Georgian people, and I delayed a closer inspection, both of them and their native architecture, until the festive spirit should have run its course.

Instead, I took the funicular to the summit of Mount David and sat for some time on the dry and rocky plateau looking down on the town.

The main town of Tiflis lies in a narrow valley and has to suffer, in high summer, an almost intolerable heat. Of late the town has spread itself on to the surrounding hills and away into the plain. A large university has been constructed and new industries have been established. On the opposite hill, standing by itself, was an orange building with Dutch gables. It was the Jesuit college in which Stalin and other Bolshevik leaders received their earliest education. Through the town runs the thick yellow waters of the

Kura river, and it was at the narrowest point, in what is to-day the oldest part of the town, that a bridge was built, which gave passage to the caravans from Persia and the East, and brought the town its first prosperity. The discovery of the sulphur springs (which are still much used) contributed to the reputation of Tiflis.

Looking down on the town the red iron roofs merge with no difficulty into the tones of the neighbouring landscape. The buildings, still decorated with banners, contributed to a scheme of crimson and rust-red. From the streets rose the insistent voice of radio.

I found a winding path down the scrubby side of the hill, and paused half-way to visit the domed and whitewashed convent of St. David. Unluckily the church was closed, but I was not long without interest, for I found a picnic party in the churchyard, who fell on me and invited me to join them.

They were three jolly Georgians, swarthy, and full of wine, humour and curiosity. They offered me a glass of red wine from a skin, and a radish sandwich, scarcely being able to believe their eyes when they heard I came from England. An amateur photographer friend of theirs came by with a camera on a tripod, and they insisted that we should be photographed, each holding aloft a glass of wine. It must have made a curious picture for the background of the churchyard was strikingly Italian. It was planted with cypresses and had a little iron balustrade overlooking the town. There were Judas-trees in flower, and a marble monument of a weeping angel still remained. From the hill-side a spring of water spouted into a marble trough. It was very still up there, and echoing.

Back at the hotel I found myself a sufferer from the after-effects of the holiday. There was, of course, no hot water and no question of a bath ; but, more annoying, there was extremely little to eat, and the service in the restaurant was more inadequate than ever. The waiters, who were evidently the cast-offs of the Plan, for they were either flat-footed and half-witted, or decrepit with age, abandoned me completely for a quarrel among themselves. They shouted and threw chairs about, and sulked, despite their years, like little boys, picking their noses and stamping their feet in corners. I subsisted as best I could on a bowl of greasy soup and a very dry omelette.

It was a relief when the May Day interlude was over and there was no longer a valid excuse for the folding of hands and the declaration that nothing could be arranged and no visits made. Not that anything could be accomplished in Tiflis even on a so-called working day without a superhuman effort and a strong control over patience and temper, but at least indignation could be more justifiably expressed when the cause was merely complete indolence. I did, however, succeed in securing a car to take me to Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia and one of the most splendid examples of Georgian architecture.

Driving out to Tiflis to Mtskheta, along the valley of the Kura, we came to a large hydro-electric station, and close to it, on a promontory above the river, stood a giant statue of Lenin in declamatory attitude, a most impressive spectacle in so remote and romantic a spot. Mtskheta stands on the river-bank, a wretched village of wooden houses adorned with fretwork balconies and dominated by the large cathedral of Sveti Tskhoveli.

To the visitor from Western Europe the style of the building strongly echoes the contemporary eleventh-century Romanesque architecture in France : there are the same round arches, the same arcading on the wall, the doorways in deep recesses, and stone is the material employed. But the difference, as has been pointed out,<sup>1</sup> lies in the use of ornamentation. In Romanesque churches ornament is used in conjunction with the structure ; in Trans-Caucasia ornament is imposed upon the structure, is independent of it. The outside walls of Mtskheth Cathedral, for example, bear many plaques and bosses, of beautiful design, several revealing a Byzantine origin. In outline, however, the two styles are extraordinarily similar. Looking at these gold-brown Georgian churches, and at those in Armenia, I recognised that a style had been created—and a wholly satisfactory style—while the churches of Russia, on the other hand, though certainly beautiful, owed their beauty mainly to the picturesque.

The bishop of the cathedral, a fine-looking old man with grey beard, long hair, skull cap and black cassock, took me round and permitted me to pass beyond the *ikonostas* to obtain a view of the frescoes in the sanctuary. They represented the twelve apostles, more than life-size, and in excellent preservation ; but, like many other frescoes on the wall, were of eighteenth-century work. Two exceptions were the great Panaoston, over the altar, and an Annunciation, on the north wall, both earlier and impressive in design. I enquired for the church treasury and was told it had all been removed to Tiflis and was not on view. There were no icons of any merit to be seen.

<sup>1</sup> By David Roden Buxton in *Russian Medieval Architecture*.

A small building within the church and covered with a coloured design was, I was told, a chapel erected in the fifth century on the supposed spot where the vesture of Christ was laid, brought by a Jew from Golgotha. The throne of the Kings of Georgia also attracted my attention. It was of white-washed stone with a canopy supported by two slender columns, and strongly resembled the throne in the Giotto frescoes at Assisi, in the scene depicting Saint Francis addressing a king. The cathedral contains many tombs of Georgian kings of the Bagratide dynasty (the Romanovs did not possess Georgia until 1803); but most impressive of all are the noble proportions of the cathedral itself, its dignity and simplicity.

The bishop bade me a courteous farewell when I left, and I hardly liked to bestow a small donation for the upkeep of the church (I imagined life was very hard for him), but I shook him warmly by the hand and gave many thanks. My last sight of the bishop was of his chasing away a party of youths playing a concertina in the graveyard.

Not far off was the convent of Samtavro, a smaller building than the cathedral and of the twelfth century, but no less beautiful in style, and richly adorned with a number of carved ornaments. Here only a few traces of frescoes remained, and they were not early work. The walls, as a whole, were whitewashed and the most striking feature was a richly-carved *ikonostas* of stone. An old nun acted as guide. She told me there were twenty-two other nuns remaining, but she lamented the harsh conditions of her life. To support themselves, she told me, the nuns made woollen garments and rough bags, which they sold in the village. She was



MTZKHET

- (i) *Cathedral of Sveti Tzkhoveli.*
- (ii) *Convent of Samtavro.*



a dirty, ragged old woman, and I did not feel particularly sorry for her, but I gave her some money, which she evidently expected, before we left. Close by, standing separately, was a bell-tower of the sixteenth century, falling into ruin, with its pepper-pot extremity overgrown with climbing shrubs.

Again the Romanesque style of the convent church reminded me of France ; and its position, too, was not dissimilar. It was built against a hill-side ; there were Judas-trees growing close by ; and the approach was made through a shady farm-yard.

On the opposite side of the river, crowning a hill, I could see the seventh-century church of Djvari, but a visit to it was said to involve a very wide detour and a difficult approach. Farther up the road, along the valley, however, were some slate slabs projecting from the hill-side, which are said to be tombs of the Iron Age.

Returning to Tiflis we passed numerous lorries full of people who, despite the chilly weather, were reported to be on their way to a picnic. They had loads of wine-bottles with them and, though crammed like cattle, looked happy enough. Their driving was erratic in the extreme and I was not surprised when we encountered two lorries which had come to grief. One had skidded off the road and lay stretched full-length across a ditch, while the other was the victim of a common puncture. Judging from the screaming children, the excited crowds and the numerous militia-men, it might have been a disaster of the first order. Nobody, however, seemed concerned to move the lorries and the road was blocked for nearly half an hour.

The Zion Cathedral, of Tiflis, is a very much



smaller building than Mtskhét Cathedral, but was completed in the seventh century, and is a structure of interest and beauty. As the fortunes of the town rose and fell the fortunes of the cathedral suffered likewise, and it was so frequently attacked that little remaining to-day is earlier than the eighteenth century.

Like most Georgian churches, it has a cone-shaped tower. To my surprise I found the cathedral was still in religious hands and an old pope was in attendance. The frescoes were of the eighteenth century and so were the icons, except for the very beautiful icon of St. Nina, carved in gold, which was proudly illuminated for my benefit.

The Georgian museum contained a most interesting collection, admirably arranged, of Georgian historical remains. On the stairs it was necessary to pass, and to admire, a brightly-coloured fresco representing Ordjonikidze cutting the first sod of the neighbouring hydro-electric station. Once upstairs, however, it was possible to examine, with little dialectical interference, the exhibition of Georgiana.

Examples of weapons and armour were to be seen, though the theory that certain tribes who wore chain-armour were descendants of the Crusaders has now been discredited, said my guide with great firmness. Æsthetically the collection of stuffs and embroideries were the most pleasing. It was easy to detect Persian influence. There were long scarves of silk and white crêpe-de-Chine embroidered in eighteenth-century designs of flowers with coloured silk and gold thread. The silk is—or was—made locally. Peasants, I was told, still bring these scarves to the museum, and I was shown one of black satin, embroidered in gold, which

had come in only the day before my visit. There were, as well, many examples of Georgian costume, including the Tudor-like hat, with small veil, worn by the women. Rich and poor wore the same style of clothing, the only difference lying in the richness of material and decoration. It was impressed on me, however, that the modern Georgian has quite abandoned the old costumes and habits. Communism, I was told, has brought civilisation to the Caucasus.

There was a small collection of church vestments and furniture in the museum "for safe keeping," and a comprehensive exhibition of photographs and plans illustrating Georgian church architecture. It made me badly want to see some of the originals, but when I enquired their whereabouts it always turned out that they were only accessible by travelling for many hours by train and more hours on horseback, and that many of the best (Ani, for instance) were across the frontier, in Turkey.

One evening a native of Tiflis, with hospitable intentions, called on me and offered to take me to visit another collection—this time of Georgian paintings, said to be extremely beautiful—which was not yet open to the public view. The curator was a friend of his and, he said, would be charmed to welcome us. Seven-thirty p.m. seemed to me an odd hour for such a call, but my friend, with true Russian disregard of time, saw nothing unusual in it.

The museum occupied the old fortress of Tiflis which, from a prison, was now being converted into a home of art. Much play on this point was made by my companion. We were received by the curator, Chevardhadze, in his private room. Conversation

was made in Georgian, and I had plenty of opportunity to study the very varied assemblage which covered the walls and filled the corners of the director's room. There were Persian tapestries, French clocks, some striking Rousseau-like paintings by a modern Georgian artist, Breton pottery, Roman statuary. Chevardhadze was evidently a man of many tastes.

While the conversationalists were busy my expectations rose at the prospect of the paintings which were to be revealed (mention had also been made of valuable icons and other church treasure), and when at length the director rose and signified that the time had come to commence the visit I was full of eager anticipation.

We crossed a courtyard and came to a door, which was unlocked with much ceremony. Beyond was a newly-whitewashed room, completely empty. We passed through a succession of other rooms, also newly whitewashed, but each one completely empty. Pauses were made in our progress from time to time, when I was evidently meant to admire. Admiration, however, is hardly achieved when there is nothing except a whitewashed wall on which to bestow it, and I was half inclined to wonder whether I was expected to adopt the tactics of the fabulous citizens who loyally admired the Emperor's new clothes when the Emperor was, in reality, naked.

"It is a wonderful museum, is it not, yes?" enquired my companion, who clearly believed in what he was saying.

I said I supposed it was, or rather it would be, and I then enquired, making it sound as much as an after-thought as possible, when the collection was expected.

The curator was questioned on this point and the

answer was, perhaps in August, perhaps in December ; it depended. On what it depended was not, however, vouchsafed.

Had the exhibits actually arrived ? Oh, yes, was the answer. There were paintings and icons and many very rare treasures.

Could one, perhaps, be permitted to see some of them ?

More questioning of the curator, until it was finally disclosed that nothing was yet unpacked.

Before I went away the curator most kindly said it had been a great pleasure to take me over the museum and he hoped I would return when the collection was in place. I said I would do my best.

Walking back to my hotel that evening I passed the cathedral and, seeing lights inside, went in. A service was in progress and a congregation of twenty or thirty people, all elderly and of the poorest peasant class, were standing before the *ikonostas*, with the bishop, who was conducting the service, in their midst. He wore a gold cape and was attended by two acolytes, also in gold. There was incense and high raucous singing. As the bishop intoned, some girls and boys, who had strayed in from the street and gathered on the fringe of the crowd, pointed and giggled at him. But he continued quite unmoved. He was nearly eighty, I should say, with thick white hair and a beautiful face ; and his was the only dignity I had so far seen in Russia.

As the incense rose and the people prostrated themselves I knew I was witnessing the fulfilment of one of the oldest instincts in the world, which, if it is denied in one form, will only be diverted into another. The connection between communism and a religious faith

was becoming clearer and clearer to me. It will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

The opportunity of hearing Goldoni in Georgian seemed to me a rare experience, and though I only managed to recognise the words "Señor Marquis" and the cupola of the Duomo at Florence (represented on the back-cloth), I was prepared to believe that the company of the Rustaveli Theatre gave a creditable performance of the comedy. It was true that the scenery and dresses were shabby and old-fashioned, and that the acting seemed more boisterous than polished, but the use of gesture was employed to the full, and with effect, while every chance for by-play was introduced with some ingenuity.

The audience were of a much poorer type than those I had seen in the theatre at Kiev. Many more were without collars and ties, and at the buffet only beer and a revolting species of *mille-feuilles* were to be had. One had a feeling that life was a good deal harder here than in the Ukraine.

At the smaller and less renowned Mardjanichvili Theatre I saw a thoroughly Georgian production. The building itself was of recent construction with good lighting and a foyer containing stage designs and model theatres, an admirable custom much practised in Russian theatres; and the piece was described as a comedy (it seemed to me a social satire), called in English: *What you have seen you will never see again*.

It concerned an old and corpulent Turkish landowner who wished to marry a peasant girl already affianced to a peasant boy. The Turk was, of course,

a tyrant and bully and the girl loath to be his bride. Only on her wedding-day when she is already in her bridal gown does the young peasant appear with his comrades in the nick of time to rescue her.

The audience reacted to the piece as if to a barn-storming melodrama, applauding wildly when the peasant girl was saved and when a servant of the Turk attacked his master, and they evidently knew the hero's repartees so well that I heard many repeating them aloud before he had spoken. The scenery and costumes were amusing and up to date, and a revolving stage was used with imagination, if it did revolve rather cumbrously. There was some superb singing of folk-tunes and the men danced many traditional Georgian dances with astonishing energy and grace. They wore high black fur caps, long black tunics, black breeches and boots and each had a bright handkerchief in his belt to match his coloured choker. With their black beards they looked magnificent, and I was again specially struck by the freedom with which the actors used their hands and the effectiveness of their gestures.

In the interval I was introduced to the director and to various members of the company attached to the theatre. Two or three spoke French and one of these—a majestic, handsome woman—took me in her hospitable charge. She swept some unfortunate spectator out of his seat in the second row of the stalls, had a chair put for herself in the gangway, and for the last two acts (the performance lasted for four hours with lengthy *entr'actes*) sat beside me and translated. When the play was over she took me back to the director's room where I was most hospitably plied with tea and biscuits.

It appeared that my friend was a tragic actress ; she played Beatrice in *The Genci*. Shakespeare was sometimes played at the Mardjanichvili Theatre, she said, and *Hamlet* was very popular.

When I told them how much I had enjoyed the performance they said things were not easy and that the theatre was poor, but one day they hoped to be invited to perform in Moscow.

As well as its theatres Tiflis has also a film-studio (Kiev and Tiflis are the two centres of film-production outside Moscow), and one afternoon I obtained permission to go over it. It was a much smaller affair than the Ukrainian studios, occupying, in fact, only a quarter of the space. I was told that when the new studios at Sukhum are ready they will replace Tiflis as the Hollywood of the Caucasus.

No shooting was taking place as the cast were away in the mountains working on a picture which required snow. But that did not mean that there was no activity. On the contrary the corridors and landings were crowded with people who appeared to be busily engaged in chattering, spitting and hawking, and hastening confusedly from one floor to another. The director was "in conference," but I was none the less ushered unceremoniously into his presence and he promptly arranged for a guide to conduct me round. This man emphasised particularly that the films produced were Georgian, not Russian. As at Kiev, I was told that at Tiflis, too, were handicapped for lack of good lighting apparatus which was only obtainable from Germany. I was shown a new studio which was being prepared for sound, but which was (of course) still "under construction."

A recently manufactured film, said to be very popular, was specially screened for me.

Before it came on my guide explained that although the story told of feuds among the mountains, such relics of a barbarous age were now, under Soviet rule, quite abolished. Nevertheless such backward people needed reminders of communist benefits. This film was evidently intended as such a reminder.

It showed two rival mountain tribes of Georgia engaged in feudal war. A member of one tribe had been murdered by another and reprisal was demanded. In place of the customary lives an enlightened member of the warring tribe proffered a milk-separator, which was accepted by the suitably bewildered and bereaved rivals, and unveiled with much ceremony on the grave of their deceased member. Dissident factions, however, saw discrepancy in the gaining of a milk-separator as atonement for the loss of a brother, and presently there was grumbling and an attempt to smash the separator. Just at this moment, however, a handsome young man (formerly a member of the tribe and now a graduate of Tiflis University) was seen advancing over the hills singing the *Internationale* and waving the Red flag. He was soon able to persuade the dissenters of the separator's value and also explained that it was really the class struggle and not tribal hatred which made them kill their rival. This explanation, naturally, made the tribesmen feel very silly and backward, and soon all showed how enlightened they had become by putting the separator to work and lustily singing the *Internationale*.

It was really rather a boring film and very poorly photographed. My guide admitted, however, that Georgian cinemas were not quite up to Russian standards yet,



but that two of the studio's directors were shortly going to gain experience in Hollywood. He said he thought Wallace Beery was a great actor and with that I heartily agreed. Incidentally, the private cinema at the Tiflis studios had the most comfortable arm-chairs I had so far met in the Soviet Union. They had, it seemed, been obtained in honour of a visit paid by Voroshilov, and the actual chair which had been occupied by the Commissar for Defence was proudly pointed out to me.

Another feature of Georgia's modern development which I was privileged to inspect was the Tiflis wireless station. At first nobody seemed at all certain where it was to be found, but after lengthy searches up and down unlikely and unsavoury alleyways, the broadcasting centre was located round a kind of barnyard. Naturally there was an assurance that new accommodation was in preparation and it seemed to me that it would not be ready before it was needed.

The studios and reception-hall consisted of three rooms, heavily furnished with mahogany, and divided only by a shabby red curtain. A song recital was in progress, not without interruptions, for there seemed to be no restrictions as to smoking, striking of matches and a general *va-et-vient*, while the homely sounds from the farm added their quota to the background effects.

Above the General Post Office, which was some distance away, the director of the station had his office and there he kindly received me.

He begged me to put to him as many questions as I liked as to the compilation and contents of the programmes and the policy of Circassian broadcasting.

“How many listeners are there?” I began, “and what are the most popular features?”

The director remained silent except to beg me to continue my questions.

“At what time of day does the programme begin?” I enquired, “and at what time does it end?”

I waited for an answer. The director spoke. He said that although I might put as many questions as I liked—and he felt sure I had a great many to ask—he could not give me the answers. His lips, it seemed, were sealed; at any rate for the moment. But he would send for a comrade who would take down all my questions in shorthand and in due course I should receive an answer.

Elaborate preparations were then made for my enquiry. The room was cleared of all but a handful of the most important officials; chairs were arranged; the shorthand expert (wizened and tight-lipped) was summoned, spread his papers and licked his pencil; and all looked at me expectantly.

I was in no way prepared for such a situation, nor was I, in actual fact, particularly curious to learn the secrets of the Georgian Regional Station; besides it is far from easy on the spur of the moment, and before a dozen alien eyes, to marshal a number of questions upon a subject of which you are by no means an expert when the only response is the scratch of a pencil.

However, I did my best not to disappoint and to convince the director that I was fired with curiosity as to the organisation of his work.

How much of his programmes was broadcast in Russian, I asked, and how much in Georgian? Were concerts and talks relayed from Moscow and

were the listeners interested in wireless plays ? What was the proportion of time given to talks, music and light entertainment, and did the news come straight from Moscow or had Tiflis its own news service ? Were there educational talks and talks to housewives ?

The scratching pencil was not a ready quickener. Still, I continued. It was obviously expected of me.

How about sport and commentaries ? And did the station deal with a large correspondence ; was a licence required to listen, and what was the price of a wireless set ?

Invention was running dry, but judging from the expectant faces round me I was evidently not yet considered to have probed deep enough. My questions became more and more haphazard. I found myself embarking on the unknown seas of short waves and kilowatts. As a final show of spirit I referred to the Children's Hour, and then signified that my enquiry was at an end.

The comrade shorthand-writer wiped his spectacles, collected his papers, bowed and left the room.

There was a definite sense of relaxed tension. It was as though the court had risen from a long and complicated session.

The director, passing judgment, said that I evidently knew a very great deal about radio and my questions would have to be most carefully considered and fully replied to. In three days I should have the answers ; they would be typewritten. We parted with much ceremonious hand-shaking all round.

But no answers came either in three days or in six, and they have not yet reached me. Somehow I do not think they ever will.

Another morning Michaelov, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, received me. He had last been *en poste* in Kabul and offered me Afghanistan as an alternative language to Russian. We made light conversation on the charms of Tiflis and the like, and only towards the end was I able to introduce the subject of the moment. I said that Tiflis had not struck me as having nearly so prosperous an air as other large towns I had visited in the Union, and I asked whether the Moscow Government gave as large a grant to the Caucasus as to minorities in Russian of equal proportions. I was told that the Government grant was the same, but that since the capital of the Ukraine had recently been moved to Kiev from Kharkov more had been done recently at Kiev, for example, in the way of new buildings. In the Ukraine and in Georgia, both national minorities, the policy of Moscow was to encourage and develop national cultural interests. As an example of this Michaelov told me that only two members of the Government of Georgia were pure Russians, himself and the Minister of Woods and Forests ; the others were all Georgians.

I next enquired how successful had been the attempts to dispense communism to the mountain tribes. Michaelov replied that communism was being quickly adopted and that 50 per cent of the mountain tribes were now collectivised. Schools were being built in villages where the inhabitants had never learnt to read or write, hospitals, too, had been erected and patients from outlying spots were collected by aeroplane for medical treatment. To the new university of Tiflis there came young men and girls who were enjoying the benefits of civilisation such as their fathers never dreamed could be possible.

It was a very rosy picture.

No doubt, the Commissar suggested, I should like to visit one of the collective farms in the neighbourhood and judge its success for myself. He proposed that I should go either to a collectivised vineyard or to a collectivised stud-farm.

I chose the stud-farm and arrangements were made for a particular date on which the visit should be made. Michaelov said he was sure I should find the stud-farm a most interesting experience, with which I warmly concurred.

There were also the writers of Georgia. A conference should be arranged for me with them at the Writers' Club and I should see the conditions under which they lived and hear their point of view. With this suggestion, too, I fell in immediately.

Dates were fixed for both appointments and I settled my own movements accordingly.

With the commissar's account of the Soviet's progressive and benevolent policy outlined in my mind I gave thanks and withdrew.

From the Georgian prince I heard a different story. We spent the evening together at one of the little drinking booths (they could hardly be designated with so genteel a title as cafés) in the old part of the town near the Persian mosque. Round us the men were sitting in velveteen jackets drinking the red wine of the country or, the more temperate, glasses of tea. At intervals a story-teller would stand up and recite, in the heroic manner, a legend of Georgia.

The prince was the son of one of those feudal lords who had ruled in undisputed sovereignty over his mountain people. He had spent a fortnight once in Paris and was hungry for news of the West. He told

me with pride that he still possessed the Revelation suit-case which had accompanied him on his journey to Europe and he enlarged on the romantic adventures which had befallen him on the way.

“ I have made a collection of twenty-nine nationalities ! ” said the prince.

To compile this cosmopolitan collection the prince had, of course, enlisted the help of the fairer sex. I could not help wondering whether the inmates of a certain establishment in Paris, where forty nations are said to be represented, had not been responsible for widening his collection. If so it seemed to me that it had been assembled with a facility which others, similarly engaged, might hardly consider “ cricket.”

After the gaities of Paris, life in Tiflis seemed to the prince very slow. The girls had fleas, he complained. One missed the cars and the lights (“ Oh ! the lights ! ”) and the girls couldn’t dance as they had danced in that delicious fortnight. Had I been lately in Paris, he enquired, and when I next went there would I send him a bottle of Coty Chypre—the scent reminded him of so much, so much . . .

The prince was very reluctant to discuss conditions in his own country (obviously he thought it very provincial and beneath the consideration of one who had been to Paris) and I had to endure lengthy accounts of chance encounters on the Rue Royale (to their climax, and beyond) to gain stray items of information as to his present life.

Finally, however, I obtained from the prince a story which differed quite a lot from the official one, and gave a picture of Soviet methods in Georgia which I have been able to confirm subsequently as a

perfectly accurate one. This is roughly a summary of the prince's story.

Over Georgia there rules to-day a dictator, a certain man named Beria, a Georgian appointed by Stalin, who is himself Georgian born. The Soviet policy of collectivisation (which means that the peasants must pool their produce and work for a centralised government) has met with very little success among the mountain peoples. Soviet agents have been sent to spread propaganda among them, but these agents have mostly been of a bad type, getting drunk in the villages and earning no respect for the régime they represent and have been paid to further. (I began to see the milk-separator film in a different light.) Beria, the dictator, has announced a three years' amnesty to the people : if collectivisation has not been voluntarily effected at the end of that time the work will be done under force. Although efforts have been made to eliminate entirely the ancient religious beliefs of the people, a form of semi-pagan worship, centuries old, still persists. There are gods of the rocks and the moon to whom sacrifice is made. Feuds and barbarism have far from abated. While I was actually in Tiflis a girl studying at the University who belonged to one of the mountain tribes was murdered by a fellow undergraduate, a tribesman, and her family at once came down from the mountains and demanded a reprisal of ten persons.

The Soviet agricultural policy in the Caucasus is no less severe than in other parts, only the people are more independent by character and offer a fiercer resistance to it. Some have gained possession of rifles and from the rocky summits on which their villages are

built shoot at all newcomers whom they suspect of threatening their independence. All the men (save those living in the towns) wear knives at their belts, and these are definitely put to other uses than the killing of game.

The conditions of life among the country people remain extremely primitive. They exist mainly on bread, potatoes and cheese and distil a rough whiskey. Drunkenness is frequent, and almost universal when dances are held at the village festivals. Many of the villages or settlements in the remoter mountain valleys are entirely cut off from the outside world (snow frequently lies on the high passes until the end of May), and it is likely that many of them have never heard that the Romanovs are no longer their rulers. It is in such parts that men may still be seen wearing chain-armour.

Those living on the mountain fringes who are more accessible to the Red agents have been merely disturbed in their beliefs, and unsettled. The burning of a collective farm is not an infrequent occurrence, and this is, of course, severely dealt with by the Tiflis government.

The policy is one of domination, carried out with an iron hand.

Nevertheless, the people have gained already something, and will gain more, from Soviet rule. Clinics and schools have been erected, though in no great number, and there is at least an attempt at a thorough penetration of modern ideas, brutal though the methods may be, which is probably more effective than the colonisation policy of the Tsarist régime.

Ignorance and dislike of new methods and ideas are certainly greater obstacles to the Soviet in the



Caucasus than an active antipathy to communism as a political creed.

General poverty and lack of little more than necessities was the general rule in Tiflis, the prince informed me, and indeed after a few evenings in the public gardens I had had no difficulty in coming to the same conclusion myself. The gardens, dusty and unattractive though they were, always were crowded, owing, I felt certain, to the housing conditions, and there was never a break in the uniformity of the drab, ill-fitting costumes or the stockingless rubber-shod feet. I could well believe that it was a favourite custom in Tiflis to slash the pocket of your neighbour in the tram-car with a razor-blade and drain out the coins within.

Still, it was plain that decided efforts were being made to modernise and improve the town.

The collection of booths known as the Caravanseraï (which stood in the square now used for the May Day celebrations and the like) was swept away only two years before my visit, and one narrow street alone remains for Asiatic traders (and private enterprise), whose goods appeared to consist solely of iron-work and brass.

A new bridge and a fine riverside front had recently been completed and a broad drive had been cut into the high land above the town. Outside the town I had seen the new hydro-electric station and there was evidence that new industries were being created.

Blind allegiance was, of course, the Government's price : while I was in Tiflis the entire staff of a newspaper was arrested for the publication of an article dealing with the League of Nations to which the Government objected.

Succeeding invasions by peoples of Eastern races, Persians, Arabs and Mongols, have bequeathed to the Georgians an even greater disregard of time and customary European observances than is to be found among the Russians. Indolence is very pronounced and there seemed little attempt to keep to the ordinary rules of honesty. There is some compensation for all this, however, in the fine appearance of the people, the women being usually possessed of remarkably large brown eyes, the men of excellent carriage, and both sexes having dark hair and brown skins. The young are exceedingly promiscuous and, according to the prince, a favourite rendezvous was at the ancient sulphur-bath house where rooms might be hired by the hour. Homosexuality was frequent among all classes of men.

It was late before I said good-night to the prince and I had some difficulty in excusing myself from returning to his rooms to see the luggage and hotel labels on his Revelation suit-case, which had been carefully preserved as souvenirs of his memorable.

When I suggested that he should make another journey to Europe he did no more than shake his head despondently and say : " I have no means, no means," and when I asked whether he meant he was in financial straits or official disgrace, he could do no more than purse his lips and nod his head, sighing. I promised him I would not forget the bottle of Coty Chypre.

## VII

### SOVIET ARMENIA

**F**ROM LENINGRAD, IN THE NORTH, TO ERIVAN, THE most southerly town in the Union, and the capital of Soviet Armenia, there is an air-line which maintains, at least from Leningrad to Rostov, a regular passenger service. Further south, owing to the height of the mountain ranges the line makes a wide detour and time-tables are frequently interrupted for reasons of weather. Still, flying is developing rapidly in the Soviet Union. At Tiflis I heard that there was a perfectly good aerodrome, and since the railway takes sixteen hours to reach Erivan from Tiflis, I decided to take the air route to Armenia.

Enquiry told me that it was necessary to fly over a 13,000-foot pass, and as this was sometimes obscured by mist the start had to be made early in the day.

I rose, therefore, at 7 a.m. on a certain morning in May, and, stuffing a few necessities into a rucksack, descended to find a message saying that there was mist over the pass and that the aeroplane would not start for another hour.

My flying experiences have almost entirely been confined to passages in the conventional air-liner, but even these flights have been invariably attended by excitement mingled with alarm. Alone, in a foreign land, with the prospect of a flight over a precipitous and mist-wreathed pass, alarm bid fair for a moment or two to outweigh excitement, and air experts must

forgive me if they read in the following account a distinct naïveté which should certainly be absent in telling of what would be, to them, a perfectly ordinary journey. I still regard flying as far the most exciting of modern sensations and am frankly prepared to enjoy every moment in the air until custom stales it, as it has done the railway journey.

Starting for the aerodrome was for me, therefore, the beginning of an adventure. It was also, as it turned out, by no means a clear start.

The aerodrome lay perhaps ten miles outside Tiflis, in the green plain, and to it there led a road which even by Soviet standards was hardly worthy of the name. It had a very bad effect on the mechanism of the car. Twice the engine died and the driver spent laborious and lengthy efforts at reviving it.

As I sat waiting in the warm, still, morning air, I found myself wondering whether Russian aeroplane engines were as liable to sudden collapse as the engines of their cars.

Finally, by jumps and jerks, we reached the entrance of the air-port and there the car stuck immovably for the third and last time. I approached on foot. To cover a distance of ten miles we had taken over an hour and it seemed likely that the aeroplane had already started. Russian time is, however, extremely flexible, and delay need very seldom be taken seriously into account.

There was not, in this case, the sign of an aeroplane stirring.

In the waiting-room of the air-port some officials were playing billiards and others were quietly sunning themselves on benches outside. There was a bar, but I was relieved to note that it only purveyed milk.

It was said that mist (over the pass) persisted : meanwhile the officials invited me to join them in the sun outside. We drank a glass of milk all around and trampled some black beetles underfoot. The flying-field looked very smooth and sunny in the clear morning air : there was no movement of any sort.

Suddenly one of my neighbours rose to his feet and announced that it was necessary to start, and to start immediately.

I was hurried away, fitted into a fur-lined overall and helmet and equipped with a pair of goggles. Then, thinking how hard it would be to leap from the flaming plane when it crashed in the pass, I staggered across the ground to the waiting aeroplane.

It was an open machine of the sort which has only two places behind each other, for the pilot and one passenger, and it looked to me remarkably puny. It was painted dark green and carried a red star on either wing.

I climbed in and my rucsac was plumped beneath my legs ; my knees were wedged against two sacks of mail ; my coat was spread as a rug. All round me were gadgets of every sort, each one of which I felt sure I should damage accidentally and bring about a crash, or be called upon to manipulate in mid-air, causing results equally disastrous. The pilot—young and red-faced—flung a leg over the side and settled into his place. The engine was set going. A woman in a white kerchief gave a final polish to the flank of the machine ; someone out on the flying-ground waved a white flag, and we started away.

That start never fails to be wildly exhilarating. As you move forward you get a real sensation of speed which vanishes as soon as you are off the ground, and

once in the air, with the clouds drifting by, there is nothing to gauge speed by, nor any feeling of passing quickly over the earth.

It seemed almost at once as though we were far from the ground. At first I looked out only to one side—to my left—having the feeling that if I moved I should dislodge the aeroplane, but gaining confidence I peered out on both sides. Then I suddenly caught sight of my face, goggled and becappped, reflected in an indicator opposite. And that made me laugh till I realised I was feeling supremely happy.

The earth below, smooth and olive-coloured, looked so kindly that I felt it could do no harm. My only worry was the engine, but that sounded steady enough; indeed, its drone soon became monotonous. There was no bumping at all. I realised we were climbing higher and higher and I saw the pilot turning his head sometimes to left or to right. Ahead of us, above the woolly clouds, flattened in a way which seemed surprising, appeared a ridge of black mountains striped with snow, and after an hour's flying we reached the pass and appeared to fly low above the deserted land. As we flew over the pass I saw long patches of snow shaped like *langues des chats* on earth black with Spring. We had reached 13,000 feet. The machine was so steady and the outlook so serene that I could not imagine anything catastrophic happening.

Soon there appeared below a small town with some new construction and as the pilot was making preparation to land I imagined it must be Erivan. It turned out it was only a port of call. From nowhere two men sprang forward and were handed a sack of letters. Then, after the pilot had stretched his legs

in the field of young hay which constituted the flying-ground and smoked a cigarette, we taxied off and rose again.

Our course now followed a broad mountain valley until, joining another valley at right angles, we turned sharp to the south-east. At this point, where the valleys met, there was considerable bumping and I found I was instinctively trying to steady myself by clutching the wooden sides of the cockpit.

Rising from the plain beyond I saw a solitary mountain which I took to be Ararat, but we flew by and passed it, coming so close that the wing of the machine seemed almost to touch it. Below, the earth appeared to have cracked its surface and split into wide ravines.

In another half-hour Erivan came in sight, spread out on the slopes of a mountain at the extreme end of the plain. Soon a white circle showed on the grass beneath and in its centre a tiny pyre of smoke. In ten minutes we had taxied to a standstill.

With the rushing wind suddenly vanished it seemed sitting there in the silence and the sudden warmth of the sun that one was only half-alive. My ears stung and the sounds of the world were very remote.

I climbed out, removed my flying-suit in the shadow of the plane, shook hands with the red-faced, nonchalant pilot, pressed on him some English cigarettes, and walked away across the ground. I was conscious of great exhilaration after that journey through the high air and a strange contentment that it had been successfully accomplished.

It will be a loss when custom deadens the living pleasure of flight.

Whether or not it was due to my frame of mind on arrival or to the fact that the guide who met me had only recently arrived from France and possessed, as well as a Gallic sense of humour, acquaintance with and, to a degree which seemed remarkable after a taste of the Georgian manner, the practice of European efficiency, I took a liking to Erivan. There was a brightness, almost a gaiety, in the air which seemed to promise enterprise and something more stimulating than Russian resignation.

My guide at least lost no time in acquainting me with the modern developments of Erivan. Pointing with one hand at a newly erected building which housed a plant for manufacturing synthetic rubber (soon to have the largest output in the world) and with the other in the direction of Lake Sevan, where a dam bigger than Dnieproges is in the process of construction, he conducted me straight from the airport to a carpet factory.

After a round of clinics and tractors, carpets seemed most welcome in their suggestions of homeliness and domesticity.

It was unfortunate that I could not admire Armenian designs and that whenever I pointed with favour at a particular rug or carpet I was told that the design was Persian or Circassian, but the young artist who showed me round clearly attributed our differing tastes to my ignorance, in which estimate he was doubtless entirely correct.

Still, I did think his pride was ill-placed when he showed me one rug (clearly his *chef d'œuvre*) on which was worked in colour a giant portrait of Lenin. An even more striking creation must have been the carpet presented by the factory to President Roosevelt, which



bore, according to its designer, a full-length portrait of the President, so true to life in every detail that each hair on the back of the Presidential hand was represented.

Rugs from Erivan are supplied all over the Union, and many are exported. A selection were even to be found on the floor of my hotel bedroom, an acceptable comfort after the bare boards everywhere else.

Snatching a curious meal of beer and toast (it was then 1.30 p.m. and I was very hungry after my flight, but luncheon was not yet ready) I was conducted for a visit to the major sights of the town.

More than any other town I had visited in the Soviet Union, Erivan appeared to have planned its new construction on practical and sensible lines. Its population has risen in fifteen years from 30,000 to 150,000 and it is rising steadily.

A complete new town is already shaping. Hospitals (where a study of malaria, the scourge of the district, is particularly made), a university, schools, cinemas, broad streets and wide squares have all risen since 1921. The Armenian character has evidently responded to the opportunities of development offered by the Soviet, and Armenia must be one of the most successful of the national minorities.

To me the most interesting of the new constructions was a great theatre begun in 1928 and expected to be completed in two years' time. It is planned for spectacular performances, a characteristic feature of Moscow's taste to-day which delights in size and the grandiose, and when completed will seat 2000 spectators. But what is most remarkable is the plan for a revolving stage which can be used in summer for an open-air auditorium and in winter for a closed

theatre. The theatre is built in the style of an arena and will be half-roofed and half-open to the sky, scenery will divide the rounded floor of the stage and the actors will always enter from the same spots winter and summer. I was interested to see that space had been allotted for a ring of private boxes.

There was a model of the complete design available for inspection which revealed the fact that a very displeasing neo-classical façade is planned. I was assured that the completed building would be a great example of modern Armenian architecture, whatever that may be.

There was significance in the architectural style of a new cinema only just completed in the centre of the town. Opposite it was the State theatre, a building erected eight years before in concrete and with good modern lines and a thoroughly up-to-date appearance consistent with a new town. The newer building, however, had an over-elaborate frontage of pillars, each surmounted by a pointless bauble and altogether suggesting fussiness and poor taste. I remarked on this apparently retrograde step to my guide, who frankly admitted that people had no more use for the bare, functional style, exemplified by the State theatre, since it reminded them of the first years after the Revolution, when such buildings were erected, and the attendant hardships of that time.

Now, in fact, that things were improving, they preferred to return to the style which they associated with the security of pre-Civil War days.

If, however, the new buildings lacked taste and revealed unexpected tendencies for a country of revolution, and if the roads were mainly unfinished

and flooded by the gutters' overflow, the modernisation of Erivan was remarkable. I gained an idea of what has been accomplished in a comparatively short space and under abnormal difficulties by inspecting the old town, parts of which remain inhabited by Turkish and Persian families.

The narrow streets of mud walls are redolent with all the squalor of the East. Ragged children squat over their dusty street-games while their parents, sallow and diseased, stand unoccupied on the street corners.

There is a Persian mosque of the eighteenth century standing in a pleasant shady courtyard of small dwellings, at the doors of which sit old Turk-Pers-Armenians over their nargiles.

But old Erivan is not picturesque ; it is merely squalid and dilapidated, and the Government have done well to condemn it to death.

So full is Erivan of new developments and activities that one could not walk down the street without meeting half a dozen of the administrative or intellectual leaders. Everyone seemed to be somebody, and in the company of my guide, who knew them all, I was soon acquainted with the élite of Erivan.

Here was a poet, a leading engineer, the director of the museum of Revolution, a musical critic, the head of the tramways, a novelist, a judge, a tenor from the opera. Erivan society was indeed so distinguished that I could almost understand the plight of the American lady journalist who, sent by her

newspaper for an account of Armenian culture, had been kept so busy with her interviews that for three days, as far as I could gather, she had only had time to subsist on a bag of nuts.

Appropriately, for the newly established town, the two representatives of the Government who were kind enough to receive me were both representatives of youth. The Commissar for Education, Egassarian, was a young man of thirty-three, and he told me something of the great enthusiasm for, and the development of, educational facilities in Armenia, and the creation of the Erivan university.

Melikov, the diplomatic agent, a fair-haired Russian, was another young man in the thirties. He looked strikingly European in this town of swarthy faces, and it turned out that he had been attached to the Soviet Embassy in London. I remember with great pleasure my talk with Melikov.

It was he who arranged for me a visit to the Government Theatre Number 1, where I sat at the back of the hall in a curtained recess which served as the Government box. The play was an Armenian comedy entitled *Kha tabala* and told the not unfamiliar story of a father trying to marry off his dull and ugly daughter. The emphasis and gesture was even more pronounced here than on the Georgian stage, but I detected a cruder, more obvious style of acting, and a lack of the imagination and the rhythm which distinguished the actors of Tiflis. The décor was formal, brightly coloured and interested me, though the nut-fed American declared it was "just too Moscow 1925," and therefore out of date.

The audience was youthful and tough. Caps were generally worn, and I was very interested to learn that

Moscow was about to pass a cultural decree forbidding the wearing of hats and caps (together, one presumes, with bonnets) in theatres, cinemas and places of entertainment.

The fact—proudly reiterated by the citizens—that trams in Erivan run all night does not add to the comfort of visitors, but the inclusion of delicious rose-leaf jam in the breakfast menu is a certain atonement for a broken night. The cuisine of the hotel at Erivan indeed deserves a special mention in the course of a journey through a land where the art of cooking is sadly neglected. At Erivan I remember particularly an excellent pilaff and some remarkably good stewed peaches of local growing. The cognac is not advisable though, as in other parts of the Soviet Union, it will be strongly recommended to the visitor ; and in this connection it is as well to add that the modern Russian champagne is far from being all that it is said to be. Vodka, on the other hand—once the taste for it has been acquired—is an excellent stimulant, and may be had in varying degrees of alcoholic potency.

After breakfasting it was insisted that I should visit an exhibition of etchings by a favourite Armenian artist. The artist had worked in Paris before the War and his subjects and style were of that period. He seemed to have specialised in portraits of old concierges of either sex, barges, or ladies compositely described by my companion as “Madame Fou-Fou.” I regretted that I could not subscribe to popular Armenian taste.

To the monastery of Etchmiadzin I later made my way, not without feelings of excitement. The road

out of the town was laid with a surface of ruts and dusts—and the driver had a taste for speed. Brooks, streams, crags, torrents were no obstacles to him ; nor, more remarkable, to his car.

We left the mountains behind us and motored into the open plain. Standing alone, some twenty miles away to the south, was an isolated mountain, none other than Mount Ararat, where nowadays the three frontiers of Iran, Turkey and the U.S.S.R. converge. The summit of Ararat, alas, was hidden in cloud or rather, in the Russian version, Ararat was “closed.”

On both sides of the road the fields were lined by fresh green poplars, and I noticed many newly planted vineyards. We passed a caravan of six camels, and occasionally there were tractors working on the fields. From time to time by the side of the road there was an archway of rough wood surmounted by a five-pointed star, painted red, which marked the entrance to a collective farm, either of fruit or vines. The scanty villages were miserable enough, but all were adorned with crimson banners.

A little way off the road, close to a grove of young poplars, were the ruins of Zvartnotz, a church built in the seventh century and razed to the ground by the Arabs in the tenth. All that remains of Zvartnotz to-day are the capitals of its fallen columns, which suggest by their rich carving and majestic dimensions that the church must once have been of some importance. The capitals lie roughly in a circle on raised ground and from them there is a wide view of the plain and the far mountains. A crowd of poppies growing among the stones together with the surrounding view give to the place almost a hint of Greece.

Not far off stands the church of St. Ripsima, a

seventh-century building of the "apse-buttressed square" type and of particular interest to students of architecture, though to all it must appear a very satisfying piece of work. The church carries a dome 46 feet across and is of the cinnamon-coloured stone peculiar to Trans-Caucasia. The porch was added in the seventeenth century and the bell turret above it in the eighteenth. Within, the church has been converted, unostentatiously, into a museum and services are no longer held. I was escorted by the curator, a jovial party in the velveteens of a labourer, who took particular delight in drawing my attention to some stone exhibits of a phallic nature. The tomb of St. Ripsima, a female saint said to have brought Christianity from Rome, was indicated to me in a vault, but unfortunately a merchant from Baku had embellished the tomb in the nineteenth century with, what seemed to me, regrettable results.

Looking back on the church from the road it presented a decided austerity of appearance. The eye, accustomed to the sharp monuments of Gothic or the elaborate convolutions of the baroque, looks for projecting buttresses, decoration or ornament. But here there were none. Nevertheless, it is held by many that from the Armenian style—and from such churches as St. Ripsima—the whole of mediæval architecture in the West is descended. The general appearance of St. Ripsima at least seems to confirm the first half of the hypothesis, that Armenian architecture derives its style from the East, and Persia in particular. I am far from being scholar enough to venture an opinion upon the second proposition, but it may at least be said that St. Ripsima echoes strongly a reminder of certain Italian buildings of the fourteenth century.

The monastery of Etchmiadzin itself lies a mile or two from St. Ripsima and is separated from the white-washed village which bears its name by a low brick wall.

I was taken first to the library of the monastery, a modern building of grey stone with a collection of Oriental books, said by my guide to number 8000 volumes and to be the third finest collection of its kind in the world. I was not in a position either to confirm or deny this statement, but of one thing I felt certain, that the treasures of the library, if treasures they be, would not remain intact for very much longer. Books with the most fragile bindings were picked out of the shelves, bent open and laid about in the most casual manner possible, while from under a glass case, clearly reserved for the most valuable works, a thirteenth-century gospel was snatched, and its pages fluttered for inspection before it was passed round from hand to hand.

I walked across a courtyard shaded with poplars to the Cathedral of the Virgin and was taken in charge by a jolly, black-bearded monk in black cowl and robe with a black silk girdle.

The Katholikos of the Armenian Church still resides at Etchmiadzin, as has been the custom since the beginning of the fifth century, and the cathedral is the centre of the Armenian faith. According to legend the cathedral was built in 303 by Gregory the Illuminator on the spot where God's only Son appeared to him; hence the name Etchmiadzin, which means "the only begotten Son is descended."

The present building, constructed of large blocks of cinnamon stone, is probably sixth-century work. The west doorway is decorated with rich interlacing



patterns which strongly resemble similar work on Celtic stones, and it is thought by some that these ideas were carried westwards by the Goths and did indeed influence decorative designs in Scotland and Ireland. Others, on the contrary, see a refutation of this argument in the different treatment of the plait forming the basis of the pattern.

It is plain at least that the Armenian plait pattern came originally from Persia, or at any rate is Eastern in conception.

The interior of the cathedral was hard to examine, since it was fully furnished with icons, lamps, and applied decoration. Rich rugs covered the floor. The most striking adornments were two thrones, one of carved wood and the other of mother-of-pearl, which were the gifts of Armenians in India and Smyrna. Both are of the eighteenth century. In the treasury of the cathedral an elaborate casket was pointed out as containing the hand of St. Gregory, and a cupboard was opened to disclose row upon row of chalices, monstrances, episcopal crowns and the like, all lying under a heavy coating of dust. Most beautiful was the collection of vestments in shades of rose-pink and grass-green, cut from rich Persian stuffs and bearing Persian designs.

Over all hung the faint devotional odour of incense.

Outside, in the sun, reigned the customary calm of the cloister. The robed figure of a brother paced up and down. The chink of a spade against stone and the gentle fall of earth could be heard from a neighbouring garden. The voice of the Soviet seemed as far away as it might in the court of St. Cross. All was calm and at peace.



ETCHMIADZIN

- (i) *Cathedral of the Virgin.*
- (ii) *A group of young Comsomol.*



It was at this point in my reflections that I was brought a message by my Armenian escort to say that one of the bishops attached to the cathedral would be pleased to show me his living quarters and invited me to join with him in a glass of wine.

It appeared that the bishop had extended this hospitable invitation to other visitors to the cathedral, for presently a party of six or seven of us mounted the steep wooden staircase to the bishop's apartments. The others were just as curious as I was to see the interior of the monastery. There were two Armenian families, with children, and all being sons of communism they were no doubt greedy to learn just how far went the excesses of the Church.

The bishop himself led the way. He was a fine-looking man in a coarse peasant way, with a black beard and a swarthy brown face. He wore a seedy black cassock and a skull cap of pale blue velvet, and he needed a shave badly.

Our progress upstairs was somewhat delayed by the two Armenian men who, as if in polite play, opened all the available cupboards on the stairs to peer inside ; one of the little girls, moreover, took sudden fright and screamed loudly at each upward step.

Finally, however, we were all ensconced in the bishop's sitting-room, each of us allotted a hard wooden chair, forming a polite circle.

Then there came an unexpected and dramatic turn in the proceedings. Starting from his chair one of the men peered into the bishop's face, beckoned his friend, and the three of them set forth in excited and voluble conversation. Presently the reason for the outburst was explained to me.

It appeared that during the Civil War of 1920 the

two men, who were fighting at that time for the Bolsheviks, had been captured and imprisoned on an island in Lake Sevan, where the prison chaplain had been none other than the bishop who was now our host. It appeared too that the two men had contrived their escape by swimming ten miles to the mainland.

The atmosphere became more than friendly. A map was produced, and for the benefit of all a full explanation of the escape was given, including even a pantomimic representation of the swimming strokes employed and of the exhausted prisoner reaching shore. No one joined more heartily in the general jubilation than the bishop, who in his turn gave impersonations of the various prisoners, whose souls he had been charged to cure.

Celebration of this happy meeting was clearly demanded and the bishop distributed to each guest a white coffee-cup decorated, most surprisingly, with portraits of nineteenth-century French actresses, and filled each cup from a bottle of sour white wine. Children and all shared in the celebration and everyone got very excited. Just as the party was at its height a rat emerged from the wainscoting, fled across the room, and was pursued by the general company into the bishop's bedroom adjoining, from which it was carried dead to everybody's satisfaction. Until the party dispersed the children occupied themselves by playing with the dead rat in a corner. It was a queer sort of party for a bishop's, but then I was embarked on a queer sort of journey.

Back in Erivan that evening the rain came on in torrents and the streets were quickly reduced to

rivers of mud. The chairman of the Armenian Authors' Trades Union was rumoured to be coming to call on me, and I was duly in attendance at the time of his reputed approach and for two hours afterwards. At the end of that time, however, it was said that he had gone out of Erivan for the day.

By way of compensation I was taken to see the former palace of the Persian Khan.<sup>4</sup> It is now inhabited by the secretary of a local art committee. Without warning we went straight for the main reception-room of the palace (the balcony of which was strewn with washing out to dry) and found the unfortunate secretary dozing on a bed in the corner. The palace had been garishly restored, and I regretted that the secretary had been roused to such small purpose.

I was present, later, at a performance of an opera entitled *Almast*, the work of a modern Armenian composer. It was based on a legend of the country recounting the love of Queen Almast for a Persian khan and the betrayal of her husband and her castle for the khan and his followers.

Music and staging were on generous Wagnerian lines as was the figure of the leading singer who took the role of the Queen. Her part demanded a powerful voice and of this she gave without stint. But it was unlucky that she chose to add to it a dance. This, surrounded by her maidens, she performed by slewing round on the heels of her shoes and flapping from time to time a yellow chiffon handkerchief.

There was more ambitious dancing by the male members of the company which was a delight to watch. Though not so graceful as the Georgians their steps were the most vigorous that I had seen.

Opera at Erivan was clearly a social occasion. The

conductor was in a white tie and a tail coat and the more fashionable, I noted, delayed their arrival in the stalls until after the second act. In the foyer during the intervals there seemed to be a definitely higher standard of dress than at Tiflis.

Erivan altogether struck me as being an alive and prospering capital, a refreshing change from the enervating atmosphere of Tiflis—and the Georgians.

The night train was not, for a wonder, overcrowded. It is true that I shared my compartment with three others, but that I had come to regard as a fair average, and, besides, these companions were full of little attentions to me, offering pieces of ham roll and showing me the best methods of disposing of my clothes. There was, of course, no warm water in the lavatory next morning for shaving, but the fact that I was able to get into that apartment at all was something of an accomplishment, and there was even a dining-car attached to the train. It is true again that the car was of the most antiquated pattern and could only supply a breakfast of tea and a dried roll (for which an equivalent charge of two shillings was made) but the actual presence of a dining-car was an improvement on conditions reported by previous travellers. When a blind beggar came through the car I saw another traveller give him a plate of brown bread.

All day the train passed through the mountains of the South Caucasus, stopping frequently at small and isolated stations. The air was delicious. It was sunny and fresh, and the country at its best with the fullness of Spring. At first the mountains were bare and

deeply marked by ravines, but later in the day we came to wooded valleys with rushing muddy rivers. The mountain villages were poor-looking in the extreme with houses, or rather dwellings, consisting of mud or wood. At most stations women came to the train selling eggs and glasses of milk and sometimes there were children with pails crying "Voda ! Voda !" offering water for sale.

Everywhere the trees were fresh and green, their leaves turning to silver in the breeze, and often there was a sudden ice-stain of blossom. Signs of new constructions were not lacking. In two or three places electric pylons stalked across the mountain-side to the skyline and in remote valleys large electric power-stations were seen to have been lately established. Such evidence of the incursion of a new life-blood contrasted favourably with the appearance of the peasants and their children, which could scarcely have been more miserable.

In Tiflis I was back again in the familiar atmosphere of indolence and resignation.

The following day was the one selected by the Commissar for my visit to the collective farm and I had unwillingly cut short my visit to Erivan in order to keep this appointment.

At what time, I enquired with a briskness which I knew in my heart would cause no response, was I to start the next morning ?

A vague surprise was expressed. There was a shrugging of shoulders ; a turning down of the lips ; and it transpired that nothing whatsoever was known of the arrangements.

Could the telephone be employed, I suggested. A long delay, and then the answer which echoes in the



traveller's ear the length and breadth of the Soviet Union whenever such a request is made.

"The line is busy—they do not answer."

Hands were folded, and it was implied that nothing more could be done. But I was determined that something should be done and I sat at the telephone until an answer was obtained. Its content was not unexpected. The answer was that the collective farm could not be visited on the next day nor on the day following ; nor, in fact, at any time in the next ten days. There was no expression of regret nor any reason given. As to the Georgian authors whom it had been suggested would be very pleased to receive me on the following day, they too were all otherwise engaged. Perhaps in three or four days it might be possible to arrange something . . .

But my patience was almost exhausted and I announced with some spirit that I should leave Tiflis next morning. Even this attempt at a retort was received with disappointing apathy. Shoulders were again shrugged and hands very soon folded. Resignation reigned supreme.

I do not attribute such obstructiveness to a deliberate policy but rather to the trait in the Russian character—particularly marked among the inhabitants of Georgia—which shows an almost complete ignorance of the use of time, as employed by the peoples of the West. It is only a small part of the Eastern make-up of the average Russian mind, but it was the recognition of these Eastern traits which was beginning to explain many of the differences between a Western European and an Eastern, as well as the outlook which has brought about the present Government of Russia.

That night—my last in Georgia—the waiters in the restaurant quarrelled more obtrusively than usual and the food was more inadequate and inedible than ever, until I felt driven to call for the complaint book—a move invited by notices in three languages (but not in Russian) prominently displayed on each landing of the hotel.

My demand certainly seemed to cause something of a stir and at last the manager of the restaurant came to say that such a book did not actually exist.

Then why the notices, I asked.

Oh, well, several years ago, there *had* been a complaint book—and well, the notices did no harm, did they?

But the food was atrocious, I said, and the service worse. Could no improvement be made?

The manager shrugged his shoulders and smiled wanly.

He knew the food was bad ; he knew the service was worse. He himself had worked in Paris before the War and he quite understood. But nothing could be done about it, nothing. Visitors had complained before. . . . He regretted, but nothing could be done, nothing . . .

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled again, wanly.

The defeatist attitude was so overwhelming that I could do nothing but feel pity for such helplessness. Besides, it is no fun trampling when the trampled takes it lying down.

We talked a little about French dishes—though it was poor comfort for an empty stomach—and I ended by taking his address and promising to send him

menus from England. I only hope that participation at these imaginary luncheons and dinner-parties may provoke at least a momentary uplift to his spirits, though I fear that there will be little alteration in the restaurant service.

## VIII

### GEORGIAN HIGHWAY

**A**LTHOUGH THE POLICY OF PASSIVE RESISTANCE which I had encountered in Tiflis had damped the sparks of my anger I felt considerable relief as I drove away from the town. It was not relief at leaving Georgia—my experiences there, though different to those I had expected, had been most illuminating—it was rather that the racket of Soviet travel had been intensified by the wearing necessity of every suggestion and attempt at initiative having to come from the traveller himself, and Soviet travel is never at its smoothest on evening stroll. I suppose it was partly this relief which prompted me to press a lipstick and a pair of ear-rings (red, from Woolworth) on to my guide, whose surprise and delight at receiving these simple presents I took as a mark of contrition and an acknowledgment that perhaps things had not run as smoothly as they might have done.

The opening part of the road northwards from Tiflis offered nothing especially remarkable. The way led past Mtskheta and followed the wide Aragva valley, rising slowly all the time. The day was fine, with bursts of sunshine, and I prepared to enjoy myself. The first contretemps came about two hours after starting when we were still in the lowlands. The car slowed down, drew to a stop, and it was discovered that there was no petrol in the tank, and

no spare tin. This seemed to mark a certain lack of foresight on the part of the driver who was embarking on a hundred-and-thirty mile drive which was to take him (and his passenger) over a 7,000 feet pass and through the wilds of the Caucasus.

An unsuccessful attempt was made at stopping a passing lorry and finally the driver, after chewing some grass meditatively for five minutes, abandoned me, saying he would be back in a very short time. Naturally he was away nearly one hour, but it was not unpleasant sitting in the sun, and I took some photographs of passers-by. When he returned he brought with him the inner tube of a tyre brimming with a curious yellow liquid said to be "benzine." Most of this liquid spilled on the road before it could be got to the tank, but there was fortunately sufficient to take us a few miles further to the village of Dushet, where more of the yellow liquid could be obtained.

So far, the country had been pleasantly pastoral—wide mountain valleys and a mass of pink and white blossom—but once past the walled fortress of Ananur with its magnificent sixteenth century church, the mountains began to close down on the road, and the landscape took on a more romantic Salvator-Rosa-like appearance. The wayfarers were of continual and increasing interest. The most striking—and for once these peasants did not owe their picturesqueness to the rags of poverty but were genuinely decorative—were the men in an all-enveloping cloak, or *burka*, of hairy black fur, stiff across the shoulders and projecting from them almost like wings. With these they wore round black fur caps. Most of them drove in carts or were shepherding immense flocks of sheep which

often completely blocked the road for 150 yards. At the approach of the car the sheep parted with great intelligence and caused very little delay. The men and boys were almost always handsome enough to be really remarkable, and, practically without exception, wore daggers at their belts.

At Passanaur, by which time we had got well into the high mountains and were over 3000 feet up, there was a halt for luncheon. This was eaten at a rest-house built of wood in a *chinoiserie* design, and decorated with tubs of oleander. It was a charming spot. There was a dish of excellent schaslick to eat ; and a small bear two years old tethered to a barrel, asleep, in the garage.

Another party, also travelling north, drove up in a car soon after I arrived. It comprised a commissar and his wife with their chauffeur. The commissar was attired in a leather coat, astrakhan collar, and tweed cap ; she in red coat, with fur collar, and heavy make-up. The chauffeur wore uniform. All three shared a table. Before they went away I saw the commissar graciously bestowing a tip on the waiter.

As soon as we left the rest-house and started to climb we got into a drizzle of rain and in many places water poured in torrents from the mountains and over the road. But the mountain-side was still green and generally tree-covered.

At Mleti the road crossed a bridge and started to climb in earnest, backwards and forwards, higher and higher over the face of the mountain. The rain had come on more heavily and the surface of the road was becoming very muddy. Luckily the road was moderately well banked. Every now and again cloud enveloped us completely, parting suddenly to

show the valley far below and patches of snow on the tremendous heights on the other side.

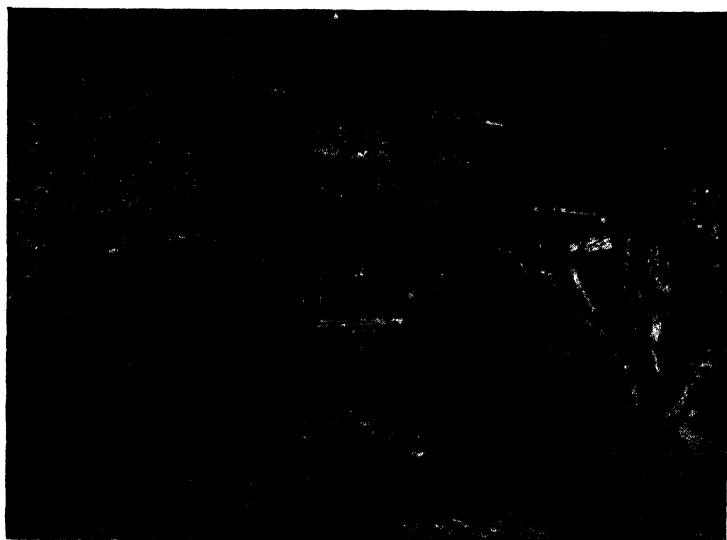
We were already up 7000 feet, and the rain was turning to snow. For nearly another hour the climb continued until at length a cluster of low wooden huts marked the summit of the Krestovi Pass, 7815 feet high.

The land was extraordinarily barren. Snow lay in the deeper folds. Standing under the doorways for shelter from the snow were some shepherds wearing sheep-skin cloaks and white felt hats shaped like the land-and-waters worn by boys at English private-schools.

The car was stopped while the driver got out and enquired the weather conditions on the northern slopes. The land-and-waters were of the opinion that as the afternoon was well advanced it would be best to stay the night at the summit. Owing to the snow and rain the surface of the road on the other side of the pass, they said, was certain to be under water, and it was a steep descent. I, on the other hand, picturing the accommodation likely to be provided in the huts, was all for continuing the journey at once, and so, fortunately, was my driver.

The brakes were tightened and on we went. It was very cold and snow beat into the car. For a few miles the road ran on the level and on each side the snow was banked high. There were long snow-sheds to protect from avalanches. It was a striking transition from the sun and blossom of a few hours before.

Soon it became clear that on the northern slopes to which we had now crossed, the rain had fortunately only just started to fall, and the road was comparatively dry. As we descended I looked in vain for the gigantic ice-pyramid of Kasbek to whose topmost



GEORGIAN HIGHWAY

- (i) *On the road.*  
(ii) *Rest-house at Passanaur.*





crag, according to legend, Prometheus was bound ; but the summit of the mountain was entirely beneath cloud and only the lower slopes were visible. In some strange way, however, one had the sensation of great mountains being close at hand. Once when the car stopped, I realised the absolute stillness of the snowy land and the freshness of the air.

The land was very much bleaker than by the way we had come. Everywhere stones and boulders had been scattered by the rivers of early Spring and the colours were of a sombre grey. We drove through the single street of modern houses which forms the village of Kasbek and I saw some Red Army guards strutting about with rifles in their hands. It was to Kasbek that pre-War travellers were accustomed to drive in their carriages from Vladikavkaz and spend the night at the posting-station in order to see the sunrise on the mountains. In the course of the descent we passed a few crowded local buses on the road and an occasional car or lorry, but on the northern side, perhaps because it was later in the day, there were very few travellers on foot.

The road left the broad bed of the valley and, turning a corner, came out high above another valley entirely enclosed on both sides and at each end, with bare rock. I remember this part of the journey most clearly. The valley had the look of an inferno ; its floor—two miles wide—was entirely covered with stones and boulders and down the middle ran a swift grey stream. There was no vegetation of any sort to be seen and the clouds came low down over the tops of the mountains, so that, once in the valley, one had the feeling of being sealed down from the outside world.

It was as forlorn and gloomy an expanse on that rain-swept evening as I have ever beheld.

At the foot of the valley we entered the Daryal Gorge—the *Porta Caspiæ* of the ancient world—and here there was only just space for the road between rock and river. The car was stopped once to permit the passing of sheep and we had to be drawn so close under the cliff walls that the water dripped off the rock into the car. In one or two places the day's rain had brought down falls of rock but luckily not of sufficient size to block our way, when we had passed through the gorge.

The driver, as if in deference to our approaching return to civilisation, halted the car and proceeded to adjust the horn. He chose for this occupation the centre of a rickety wooden bridge (except for one or two modern bridges made of stone, the rest were of wood and looked none too secure) and, looking above us, I saw the ruins of a castle, known as the Castle of Tamara. Visions of Bakst scenery and of Tchernicheva rose before me and I happily pictured the former Queen of Georgia leaning from her window and luring the passing traveller to love and death, not realising until later that the castle and the queen have, alas, no connection.

Beyond the village of Lars the valley broadened, trees began to appear, the mountains receded, until at length we were on the straight road across the plain. The rain had ceased.

Nine hours after leaving Tiflis (the drive is supposed to take six and a half hours) we reached the former Vladikavkaz which now bears the name Ordjonikidze after the renowned Soviet General of that name.

Sombre grandeur is, I suppose, the quality upon which rests the reputation of the Georgian highway, for beautiful it certainly is not. As an engineering feat, no doubt, it is highly commendable, though to-day the standard of its surface condition are much below that of other great mountain passes in Europe. It is true that the weather did not present it to me under the most favourable conditions, but I cannot believe that even in high sun at noon the enclosed, boulder-strewn Terek valley could fail to strike a chill into the heart of any but the most hard-bitten traveller. It is not an endearing road nor a road which inspired one traveller at least with a desire to pay it another visit.

Driving into Ordjonikidze I could recognise that we were back in Russia. The houses lining the streets were of that pleasant style of primitive domesticity peculiar to Russia. They were low-storied, built of brick, and painted in the characteristic tones of blue, green and white. The roads swam with mud, thick and glutinous.

At the Hotel Caucasus, the accommodation was decidedly simple but perfectly clean. A tolerable meal was produced with the exception of a so-called "national dish," which I was induced to taste, consisting of lumps of meat fried in a pan swimming with grease. As a treat I stood myself two glasses of wine, costing—although it was the cheapest wine available—half-a-crown apiece.

My bedroom had a view on to a small and depressed-looking garden, but this at least meant tranquillity and a sound night. There was, of course, no water laid on to my room, only a dripping tank, and I was interested to read in a contemporary guide-book that

such were conditions prevailing generally before the War.

It is a curious fact that in no Russian hotel in which I had so far stayed did the reading-lamp (in places where such a luxury existed) stretch as far as my bed, and make reading in bed possible. The wire would only permit of the light coming half-way and no further. Perhaps Russians do not care for reading in bed. No doubt the Plan has absorbed all their energies by nightfall, or almost all.

I had half hoped that Ordjonikidze might be lacking in all amenities and provide a respite for the travellers' eye but, no, it appeared that it had several sights to offer.

There was, to begin with, a Mohammedan mosque (built in 1906) with minaret and highly insecure balcony from which I was invited to view the prospect of town and mountain, doing so with much concern for my foothold, and there were a couple of museums. The first of these contained an exhibition of paintings by local—very local—artists, and a curious jumble of bones, stones, models of mountain villages, and cabinets of inferior china which had come, I presumed, from various houses, formerly privately owned, in the neighbourhood.

Though Ordjonikidze is in no way remarkable, it interested me as having retained the appearance of a small provincial centre of Tsarist-Russia days. Except for the addition of an electric power station outside the town and the establishment of a maize factory, there are few signs of the new régime. Timber is the main product.

The streets were very broad and very muddy, with a line of trees, pale with Spring, on either side. The

low, painted houses were flush with the roadway and many were of wood. Through the town the river Terek flows swiftly from the mountains and beside it were orchards of apple-trees in blossom.

A travelling circus was visiting the town and the vivid colours of its posters were in contrast to the universal drabness. All the townsfolk were dressed in the sombre uniform of poverty and I was accosted by three or four beggars, aged people of both sexes. There was a sad, deserted public park with a lake, in which I observed some gigantic carp, and a vulgar white chateau near it which had been turned into headquarters for the local Soviet.

Ordjonikidze is not on the main railway-line and it was necessary to travel to the junction of Beslan to make the connection to Rostov. Always accompanied by the works of the Ukrainian authors in a parcel of white cardboard, together with a rucsac and two suitcases, I made the journey in a kind of iron box with a small opening for light and air. There was only one class of carriage on this local line and the iron box was for the use of privileged travellers such as tourists and officials, to keep them free presumably from the contamination of the peasants. In this district of the North Caucasus, there are various colonies of German origin and I observed through the purdah-like aperture of the iron box several villages with obvious Bavarian features.

At Beslan there were two hours to be spent in connecting with the connection—an over-generous allowance—and nowhere to wait except in the crowded station restaurant. (It need hardly be stated that a waiting-room was “being constructed.”). A cloak-room for luggage did not exist (nor was one ever said

to be in prospect) and as I was strongly warned against leaving my effects unattended for a moment, I sat anchored in the restaurant. However, I was able to watch a peasant woman of wonderfully beautiful features drinking a glass of sour milk and scraping out every drop.

Presently it was roughly broken to me that there would be no carriages of the class to which my ticket entitled me on the Rostov train, and that I should have to travel "hard."

Here I should explain for the benefit of those who have not gone thoroughly into the question of communist travel that the traveller in Russia may make his journey in three categories of comfort. Capitalist countries simply name these categories first, second and third class, but in the Soviet Union such divisions are, of course, impracticable, since in a classless society every man worth his salt would presumably consider himself worthy of a first-class carriage, with all its attendant implications.

In order, therefore, to avoid touching on class susceptibilities, the three categories have been renamed "Hard," "Soft" and "International." The carriages have, however, retained their original form and the prices only too naturally vary, according to comfort. Except in name, therefore, there is no change whatsoever from capitalist days and conditions. The "Hard" class carriages are of wood and hold six persons, day and night; the "Soft" class are padded and contain seats and berths for four persons; and the "International" is like a wagon-lit (old style) with sleeping berths for two, and sometimes, four persons.

I was travelling "Soft" or second. The prospect of spending the night on a wooden shelf in a "Hard"

class carriage when I had paid—and paid handsomely—for a place in the “Soft,” did not appeal to me at all, and, sending imperiously for the station-master, I asked what compensation could be made me. He disclosed the fact that there was likely to be an “International” car attached to the train but it was certain to be full and that even if there were a berth available I should have to pay the equivalent of nearly £3 for its use.

As politely as I could, I said I must insist upon a berth but should not pay more than £1—which I considered a fair sum and had paid before on a journey of equal length. A tense interval prevailed until the train came in. It was then seen that, contrary to the station-master’s forecast, the International car was almost empty, and—better still—its conductor recognised me as having been on the train from Batum and greeted me as an old friend. He promptly installed me in a spacious wagon-lit intended for four persons and unoccupied by one, and only charged me fifteen shillings into the bargain. I bowed my adieux to the station-master from the window as we moved out of Beslan.

As the evening passed the mountains were left behind and on each side, to the horizon, stretched the green unbroken land. Occasionally there was a village of no apparent *raison d’être*, with a single wide muddy thoroughfare and a great white church, its gilded dome glittering in the sunset. It had turned out a beautiful and serene evening.

I had been reading Boswell but I found myself turning again and again to the window and I began to wonder whether there was not perhaps some truth in the many accounts which have been written of the



fascination of the Russian landscape. Its charm is certainly not one which may at once be received with delight through Western eyes. Johnson, who was beside me in my thoughts, would no doubt have found it "lowering"—(how delicious would have been his views on modern Russia!)—just as his contemporaries would have pronounced the highway "horrid." Mournful and sad the prospect certainly was, and it is always galling to the spirit when the eye's range is bounded by the horizon's limit, but this Russian landscape had the power to awe and to hold, rather in the same way that the sea's expanse commands respect because it cannot be calculated by man, and man cannot subdue it.

At Mineralnyi Vodi, the most select of Soviet spas, which we reached when it was dark, a young Red Army officer got into my carriage. He was plump, burly, and a Jew.

After a bit we began to talk, the opening coming from him, and being on account of my books, which he was perusing. He was very friendly, and anxious to talk, and I soon found that he was surprisingly well informed on English affairs.

Had I been to Oxford or to Cambridge College, and to Eton? he asked. He knew the names and the careers of all the political leaders in England and said he read English books on military subjects, which were translated into Russian—Liddell Hart and Fuller, for example.

He deplored the British attitude to Abyssinia. "British prestige!" he exclaimed, "and the road to India, eh?" Eden, in his opinion, shilly-shallied, but Litvinov—he was firm—"one must be firm with fascists"—and a fist was brought down on the table

between us, to emphasise this point. He said he did not think much of the English army but a great deal of the English navy, and he told me that, of the five marshals of the Soviet army, two had been members of the Tsar's Imperial Guard. He asked me if I had seen anything of Russia's great Air Force and I replied that I had only read that it was the largest, numerically, in the world.

Then I asked him about himself. He was twenty-eight and a Major. He was at the Staff Academy and had started life as a printer's assistant. Without a trace of race-consciousness he declared himself a Jew and showed me a photograph of his wife who was a Jewess. She had taken her degree in physiology he told me, and he was evidently very proud of her. They had had no children yet but both wanted a family before long.

We had some food in the dining car together and were joined by two friends of the officer's who were travelling "Hard." They had all three been holidaying at Mineralnji Vodi. Both these new acquaintances were interesting. One was round and fat with a shaven head, and very cheerful and talkative. He stood me a glass of vodka and told me he was the head of a Government poultry farm in the Ukraine. The other was an older, more serious man. He was a member of the Central Soviet at a large town in the Ukraine, and had been employed for twenty years before the Revolution at Riga, where he had worked as a revolutionary. He pointed to the lines on his face to show the endurance he had had to undergo.

Both men said there was plenty to eat in Russia now, and the little fat man added that that was just as well since he couldn't eat brown bread, only

white. He said he had been in Leningrad with the Red Army at the October Revolution (he boasted he had done a lot of shooting there) and had stayed with the Army ten years. The officer slapped him on the back and said he was a great patriot. Then he told how he had gone to Denmark to learn the business of poultry-farming and how he had 800 people working under him at the Government farm. He asked whether I would come and work there too, and he said if I were a foreign poultry specialist I should be paid 2000 roubles a month.

We drank another glass of vodka and the atmosphere got very friendly. Incidentally, the officer drank only half a glass of beer and said he never smoked. They asked if many British workers belonged to Labour organisations and how long it would be before they became communists. They regarded the idea of a communist England as a great joke and said it was a very old-fashioned country.

In their jovial peasant manner, they could not have been more charming to me. They were obviously keen supporters of the régime and talked to me quite fearlessly. All three were of course privileged members of the community and had everything to gain by its maintenance. But there was no question but that they were finding communism a satisfactory way of life.

Arriving at Rostov, seemed like a return to civilisation—at least to civilisation by Soviet standards. I was back again on the main tourist route. There was an Intourist chauffeur, with white cap, to meet me, a recently-decorated hotel, an armchair in my bedroom and a bathroom of my own. Luxury indeed !

There was also an Intourist Bureau managed by two

homely female comrades who took pains to make me welcome and had more than the mere airs of efficiency. They lost no time in settling an expedition to Zernagrod, the Government grain-farm, which lies fifty miles to the south of Rostov, and in introducing me to Miss Carver, who was to be my companion on the day's excursion.

Miss Carver, a tourist like myself, came from the Colonies and was gaping with wonder at the U.S.S.R. She was unable to speak more than one word of Russian ("Tovarich" was the limit of her vocabulary and she used it unsparingly on our drive, following it up with a lengthy sentence in English, very slowly articulated) nor had she even a phrase book with her. But Miss Carver was just as pleased as I was to have an opportunity of speaking her own language and she prattled away cheerfully to me.

She was travelling "Hard" and doing Russia in three weeks. She had come to Rostov from Moscow, where she had spent no less than five days. It was all so wonderful, so beautiful, so exciting! Why, in Moscow, she had gone to a theatre where they had a stage which actually turned round! "Think of that now! Tourist arrangements, perhaps, hadn't been quite what you would expect: the guides were generally two hours late, and of course the trains took a very long time. But, oh dear, it was wonderful to be in a land of *free people*." Miss Carver told me all about some friends of hers called Ivy and Marjorie and how clever Ivy had been in making the people in Leningrad understand she wanted an apple to eat (here followed a little homily on the necessity of eating fruit in a foreign country "in order to keep going") and all about the ripping little guide she had met in

Moscow whom they had "all christened 'Jane' because she had such a long Russian name you couldn't pronounce."

Miss Carver evidently led her colony in progressive thought. She sold contraceptives, privately, and was hungry to be shown a birth-control clinic. As we bumped over the steppes, I found myself joining in an airy conversation with Miss Carver about abortions.

At the same time, I admired Miss Carver for her enterprise. She had saved up for three years to make the journey and it would have been tragic if she had had to admit herself disappointed with the country. Besides, in her way, she had evidently been brought to Russia from a sense of the general *malaise* of the world—as I, too, had come.

To leave the town in the direction of the grain farm, it was necessary to drive south and cross the river Don. Only one bridge (apart from the railway viaduct) spanned the river, and this we discovered closed, or rather open, to allow a ship to pass. A large crowd of peasants, carts, cattle and cars (including an ambulance) was calmly waiting for the barrier to be raised and, asking how long the wait was likely to be, I was told, "Oh, two or three hours, perhaps longer." For all that time the people and the ambulance were preparing to wait quite patiently.

We ourselves spent an hour waiting for the ship to pass and the bridge to be restored—until at last it was disclosed that there was a second bridge further on which might be open.

Fortunately, news of the possibility of a passing ship had not yet reached the keeper of the second bridge and we were able to cross without delay.

Then came a two-hour drive between the low green

wheatfields and a succession of small villages with brightly-coloured cottages, and often magnificently-domed churches.

"Oh, aren't they sweet, those dear little cottages!" cried Miss Carver and leapt from the car to photograph "that jolly group of peasants" or "those splendid little Soviet citizens."

She did not remark either on the insanitary conditions of the cottages or upon the children's rags.

The road was rough but the surface dry, and motoring was not uncomfortable. It grew very hot, and mirages began to form.

Quivering in the heat and floating in the watery haze the white buildings of Zernagrod appeared before us.

The grain farm was founded in 1928, and because it is planned as a Soviet town in miniature it deserves a visit. As a State farm it is quite untypical of other organisations of the same kind, though it is one of the show places of the Union.

We were led first to the crèche, not an attractive example of welfare work. The children were all yelling, there were puddles everywhere and a strong smell of urine.

After the crèche we were given luncheon in the communal restaurant and served with the excellent ice-cream which is to be had all over Russia. A tour of the community followed.

The little colony seemed quite well planned and the buildings, including the blocks of workers' dwellings, were painted white and well arranged. The building forming the training-school was of a good modern design and over this we made our way.

Inside, it bore an ill-kept air. Paint was peeling

and steps cracked and falling away. There were research laboratories, a library and concert-hall. I spoke to one student in the library who said that the ages of students were from eighteen to thirty, and that two months of the year were spent out on the fields.

In one room we came on a young woman reading a newspaper (hurriedly concealed at our approach) having apparently deputed the seemingly important task of examining samples of corn for insects to a boy of fifteen in very ragged trousers who was bent despondently over some ears of wheat.

In the concert-hall a conference of farm directors from the district was taking place and for a minute or two I watched the proceedings. The men were mostly young and sitting about in the casual Russian manner, smoking. The director of Zernagrod was addressing them and I observed that he was a Jew.

On the outskirts of the community a street of small separate houses had been built and remarking on this I was told that nowadays many people found it preferable to live in a small house of their own than to occupy an apartment in a block.

Miss Carver uttered squeals of delight at the spectacle of a brawny girl being taught to drive a tractor round a neighbouring field, and the sight naturally drew from her a comment on the wonderful emancipation of women in Russia.

There was mention of a hospital and this, although we had been tramping in the heat for three hours, Miss Carver insisted on seeing.

It was a long bungalow building on English cottage-hospital lines and appeared to my untrained eye to be run in rough-and-ready fashion. There was, for instance, only one nurse, aged twenty-one, aided by

two untrained girls, in charge of at least twenty patients and four very new babies. Miss Carver, however, said it was just as good as anything in her colony and pronounced it quite satisfactory.

Nothing at all was kept from us. We were ushered without warning to the patients into the wards, and into the labour-room (it was not in use but if it had been I am certain we tourists would have been admitted just the same) and finally into a large empty room in the centre of which stood an iron chair enamelled white. It was the abortion chamber. Next door we were invited to peer at an unfortunate woman, grey to the lips, but smiling gallantly at her visitors who had just paid a visit to the iron chair. She had been given no anæsthetic.

Legal abortion has of course been practised in Russia for some years chiefly owing to the difficulty of procuring contraceptive materials, and if such an operation becomes necessary, it is perfectly right that it should be officially recognised and carried out under proper conditions. Mortality from the operation is, Miss Carver and I were informed, very low, but if frequently performed it cannot help having a serious effect on a woman's health. Before I left Russia a Bill was actually under discussion\* to curtail the number of operations very considerably and to encourage larger families by grants from the State. The whole question of the working of the Plan and the increase of military strength is involved in this question of breeding, but discussion of it must be left to one more expert than I.

As to this particular method of birth-control it can only be suggested that the methods practised by

\* It has subsequently been passed into law.



Western European countries would seem to have more to recommend them from the standpoint of comfort, convenience and safety.

Miss Carver's curiosity at long last sated, we motored back through the lovely evening to Rostov. As we crossed the wide valley of the Don which is turned to marshes each Spring with the flooding of the river, the town looked remarkably fine on its long ridge. Domes, warehouses, tenement blocks, and the front of the new theatre combined to make a fine façade overlooking the steppes to the horizon.

Next day there was a visit to a factory. Factories are not really my cup of tea, but as heavy industry is perpetually on every Russian's lips and its working the very life-blood of the country's system it seemed to me that such a visit should not be omitted.

Besides, it would be as negligent to go to Rome without seeing St. Peter's as to leave modern Russia failing to inspect a factory.

It was a plant for agricultural machinery, the largest in Europe, with 20,000 workers, of which 43 per cent are women. The average wage is 225 roubles per month (the monthly rent of a one-room flat costs roughly 50 roubles) with occasional benefits. Piece work is in force ; there is a seven-hour day (with an hour off for dinner) ; and a five-day week.

The factory was outside the town and round it, in good open spacing, were blocks of workers' houses in red brick. Many poplars had been planted and the best had been made of the situation.

We entered, after our passes had been scrutinised, by an underground subway and walked through the shops and assembling-rooms.

There was certainly an air of activity and very much less lounging than I had noticed in other Russian factories. Over all the alley-ways were suspended exhortations to the workers to remember Stakhanov. Here there were 3000 Stakhanovites and the photographs of some of them were displayed in many places.

The largest products were threshers, named after Stalin, which we saw being forged, riveted, assembled, painted, and driven away ; also ploughs (which are exported to Persia) and harrows.

The workers' restaurant was similar to an English institution of the same sort. There was plenty of rough food (a big plate of soup cost 65 kopecks, about 3d.) and no lack of bread, white and black.

The factory, like Zernagrod, is, of course, untypical of its kind, but because it is on such a large scale and is fulfilling an important function with success it is quite naturally selected as a show-place for visitors.

The workers looked contented and confident. There was no feeling of any "bossing" at all, nor of any concealment. Clothes were poor in the extreme and shoes in appalling condition, but despite this a large number of the girls had plucked eyebrows, rouged lips and waved hair. They wore no overalls but many had on white berets. The men wore caps.

The claims of industry being satisfied, I turned next to culture and spent an entire afternoon at the new theatre named after Gorki which was opened in November, 1935.

As with the theatre at Erivan, size seemed to have been the chief object in the minds of the architects responsible for the building ; originality and taste have suffered somewhat in consequence.

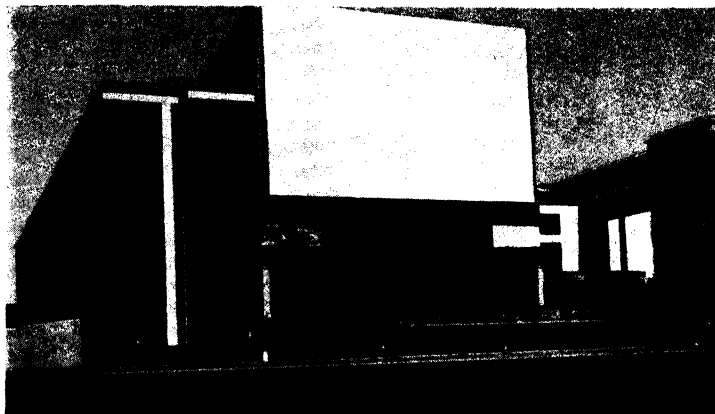
Nevertheless, the Gorki theatre was the most striking piece of modern architecture I saw in Russia, and since it is generally considered beyond the frontier that work of an advanced style is being constructed in the Union the theatre shall have more than a passing word.

It occupies a particularly fine site in a great open space looking out over the steppes with terraces, still under construction, leading down to the river.

On either side of the main front stand two towers of steel and glass, 84 feet high, containing staircases and lifts, and the façade between them is of grey marble ; it has neither colour nor decoration. On the top reposes a wedge shaped like a cheese-dish which contains a concert-hall. The front from top to bottom is 108 feet high. Some bronze reliefs in naturalistic style, showing workers constructing the theatre, form a frieze immediately above the entrances. If slightly overpowering the exterior is on the whole imposing. The architects were Chuko and Gelfri.

The interior decoration unfortunately leaves much to be desired and one could wish that the architect responsible had some of the taste displayed by his countryman, Chermayeff, at the Bexhill Pavilion. A fruit-drink fountain, for example, adorns the entrance-hall and upstairs a large foyer has been upholstered in grey cloth to which are pinned portraits of the leaders. Electric lights shaded by frills of blue silk (in the Victorian style) are suspended from the ceiling. Another foyer bears a bronze frieze, hideously naturalistic, of the People at Play.

The auditorium, which will seat over 2000 spectators, is well planned, and with a rising amphitheatre of



ROSTOV  
*Gorki Theatre.*  
ZERNAGROD  
*Workers' dwellings.*



stalls and two circles. The stage itself is 78 feet and 72 feet high and has a double revolving floor. On either side are small revolving stages often used, I was told, for Shakespeare productions.

Back-stage there were eighty dressing-rooms, loud-speakers to give the cues, a Lenin Corner, and a crèche for twenty-five children of artists and stage-hands.

The concert-hall (in the wedge shaped like a cheese-dish) was built above the theatre and auditorium and the heat in it—since it was built exactly under the roof—was stifling. An organ from the Palace of Peterhof was to be installed shortly.

In the evening Gogol's *The Government Inspector* was performed at the theatre. It was my first experience of the perfect unison of Russian acting. Every gesture, every movement of the smallest part accorded with the whole. Caricature, humour, and best of all, wit and subtlety of which I had enjoyed none up to the present in the course of my journey, were each perfectly presented.

The revolving stage was used with four permanent sets (of charming Empire décor) and the curtain was only lowered twice.

It was a brilliant performance and, as it turned out, one of the three best I was to see in Russia.

One evening before I left Rostov I sat for some time in the public gardens. They were pleasantly laid out : lilac grew in profusion ; there were dells and little streams ; white plaster-casts of famous statues had been erected among the trees and couples sat beneath them ; there were even some small cafés

with people sitting out at tables. Family parties with the mother pushing the pram were strolling in the evening sun.

I watched six enchanting children playing a game of tapping on the back and guessing who had tapped. One of the little boys was dressed in a sailor-suit and the little girls had pinafores and pink and white frocks. Their mothers sat quietly gossiping and knitting on a bench nearby ready to intervene in cases of altercation. They might have been in the Paris Bois. Anything less like the commonly imagined communist child is hard to picture.

Rostov, even from the brief glimpse I had of it, struck me as being of a cheerful and prosperous appearance, compared to other towns in the Union. There was even a briskness about the people and their doings which had been rare, indeed, in other parts. Rostov, in fact, almost made me forget I was in Russia. That arm-chair in my bedroom for instance . . .

And now began a two-day journey across Russia which was to bring me at last to Moscow.

There was scarcely a person who had not spoken of the wonders of the capital. Such movement! such life! So many people! And there was the marvellous Metro, and the Red Square, the Lenin Mausoleum, the theatres, the parks. . . . I was beginning to pine like Chekhov's Three Sisters for a taste of the gay life of Moscow.

The train was naturally full to overflowing, but it left on time and took a course along the shores of the Azov Sea. Later in the day we passed through the Donbas, the chief coal-field of Russia and the

centre of many great industrial plants. I was struck by the activity apparent everywhere. Smoke belched from every chimney and many new factories of good design were to be seen. The land was open to the sun with the coal-tips well away from the houses and I thought regretfully of the crooked valleys by the Rhondda river.

At each station children came to the train selling eggs and milk : sometimes stalls had been erected by peasant women who offered such simple farm produce. They were some of the few representatives of private trading left in Russia, and their profits cannot have been large. At one stop a young man who appeared to be in a state of collapse was lifted from a hard-class carriage and carried away on a stretcher. Otherwise there was little incident on the journey.

I had a middle-aged Jew as my travelling companion. At first I disliked his appearance and was prepared to mistrust him, but he proved to have a good heart. He was in the Commissariat of Public Health and described, with a wealth of detail, the organisation of hospitals and schools. To while away the time we played dominoes (borrowed from the conductor of the train) in which game, to my surprise, I found I was a champion. A wilting bunch of lilac, which the Jew had brought from Rostov, stood in a jam tin beside us. It was a strange afternoon.

After a scanty and exceedingly nasty evening meal in the dining-car we joined some friends of my companion who were in another carriage. Although they had all been strangers to each other at the start of the journey they had by now, in the easy Russian manner, become as if acquaintances of a life-time ; moreover,



they were prepared to extend this friendliness to another stranger, and a foreigner, such as myself.

There were four of them—two school-mistresses (one a Jewess, elderly and very arch), a good-looking Soviet air-pilot stationed in the Far East, and another young man who was a railway engineer. The airman had a gramophone on which he played tangoes and tunes from *Sous les Toits de Paris*, sighing sentimentally as he listened to them. Seeing him do this made the school-mistress giggle and the arch one became archer than ever.

We all drank glasses of tea together and the atmosphere became very warm and convivial. So much so that I was prompted to hand round a bottle of barley-sugar and some of the malted milk tablets which I had brought with me from England. The milk tablets were regarded with suspicion and did not go at all well, but the barley sugar was very popular. It was eaten with the utmost gentility, very small pieces being broken off and, with great trouble, extricated from the bottle with a spoon, to be dissolved slowly in the mouth.

Instigated by the arch schoolmistress they all subscribed to a declaration of faith which they made me promise to carry home and to publish it if I were able, though as I could scarcely convince them that there was a free Press in England they clearly believed that publication was unlikely. I do not think they believed me when I told them that books and articles of any political opinion could be published in England.

This is the message literally translated exactly as it was written down in my note-book by the arch school-mistress :—

“ *Train No. 31.*

*Some sympathetic Soviet workers of various professions were travelling to Moscow. They were very glad to meet an Englishman interested in the U.S.S.R.*

*Long live the Soviet might and the Party V.K.P., and our beloved leader, Comrade Stalin !*

*We are all glad to live in the free and happy land of the Soviets where our children enjoy a happy and merry childhood.”*

I invited them to sign their names saying that such a declaration was of little value without signatures. To this commitment, however, none were prepared to go.

By the next morning we had left behind the flat steppe country and entered the gentle woodlands of the North. Cowslips domesticated every field. Again there were the scattered villages, each with its domed church. Against these villages, which were of extreme wretchedness, were contrasted the well-built modern block in the larger towns. All along the line were signs of construction, new cuttings, and fresh lines being laid down, and many new buildings which my companion identified as schools and hospitals. Often there was as yet not even a road approaching them.

As the hot day wore on, long and tedious, I became more and more anxious to reach and to see Moscow.

I had passed through the shadow of the Kremlin and was now about to stand beneath the walls themselves. Now surely I should be conscious of and see the evidence of militant revolution. There should, there must, be an awareness of the task, a freshness of outlook, enthusiasm for the doctrine, concrete

marks of change and the new life, a confidence in the system, complete and filling every mind. Moscow, in a word, should be stimulating and reassuring, banishing the drab and lowering picture I had formed of the rest of Russia.

My eagerness was intensified when, just before six in the evening, we reached the Nirsky station.

## MOSCOW

(i)

I WAS STRUCK FIRST OF ALL BY THE NARROWNESS OF the streets and by their meanness. Here were the universal shades of off-chalk, darkening to a kind of dust-buff as had set the tones of Kiev, of Kharkov, and every other Russian town that I had seen. In Moscow, however, the universal drabness seemed ten times intensified.

There was scarcely a house of which the walls were not crumbling, the paint cracked and stained, steps missing here, a door askew on its hinges there. Buildings old and new were touched alike with dilapidation and neglect. What had once been graceful or imposing had sunk so low that it could only evoke a feeling nearer to disgust than pity. Those two colonnaded lodges in the Empire style, for example, which flank the Triumphal Gate, had the tiles missing from their roof, their little balconies rusty and twisted, their steps broken and awash with refuse. I could scarcely believe that any European capital could bear an appearance so sordid and down-at-heel, far less that such should be the countenance of the New Jerusalem.

There were, of course, signs of the new order. In the centre of what Madame de Staël once described as "*la Rome Tartare*," two tall blocks of the Chicago 1926 school had recently been raised, one

housing the Commissariat of Agriculture, the other, *vis-à-vis*, being the new Moscow hotel (for Russians only). There were also a number of new blocks of dwellings in uninspired designs, but these had apparently been constructed in such haste and of such poor materials that they too were stained and crumbling, echoing the general note of decay. At intervals the pillared entrances to the new Metro. stations were to be observed, but they again, though only completed a year before, had worn as badly as the rest.

The gaint statues of Soviet Youth and Maiden which decorate the Central station were clothed with bathing-slip and brassière; their features were already thoroughly weather-beaten.

On the bank of the turgid river Moskva stood the grey and forbidding block of the Udarnik, housing the members of the Government and their families. Further along, the chimneys of the electricity station poured a continuous stream of black smoke over the city.

Amidst the strange hotch-potch of styles—nineteenth-century, Oriental, provincial, barbaric, Paris of the 'ninety's, Central Europe and America of the twenty's—all smeared with neglect, battered by revolution, jostling each other, confused, disorderly, half razed to the ground, half built up again, which constitute the capital of Russia to-day, half a dozen separate buildings recall a former magnificence. One of these is the Lenin Library, formerly the Rumyantsov Museum, a white, eighteenth-century baroque building; another, the long Manège, an Empire building, pillared and adorned with trophies. The Manège, however, is soon to be destroyed to make way for a wide thoroughfare. Destruction, aiming at a modern-

isation as yet very far off, has been applied with scant consideration for the past. Trees and gardens have given way to tarred expanses for motor-bus parking grounds.

Arriving at sites upon which, up to a few years ago, had stood churches of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, I found a heap of rubble, a hoarding signifying that demolition was in progress, or at best a battered relic—boarded and padlocked—awaiting obliteration. For the seventeenth-century Convent of the Passion, another fate has been reserved. Across the façade, a gigantic hoarding advertising a film of circus-life had been erected, forming as vulgar a sight as any of the worst excesses of the capitalist world.

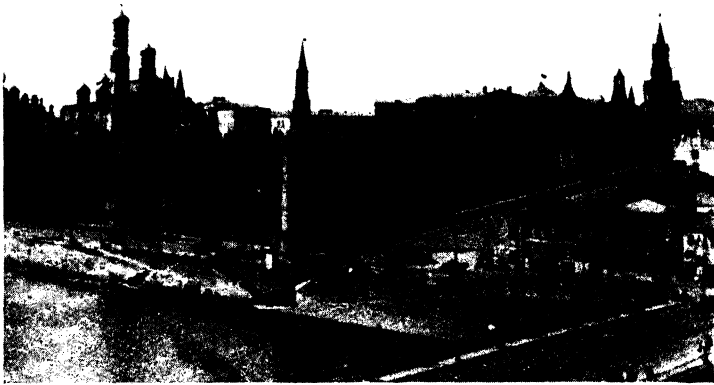
Symbols of the bourgeois world though they may be, the modern Russian has been unable to resist any longer certain popular features of the West. Neon signs, flickering a trifle feebly, proclaim hotels and shops ; kiosks, plastered with advertisements for Government goods, dispense tobacco (a popular brand is named “ Svetlana ” after Stalin’s daughter), and glasses of milk. In the central part of the city there are cafés, selling excellent beer, as well as tea and toast, which are frequented by tourists and the privileged, and where American girls are sometimes to be found serving as waitresses in order to gain first-hand experience of Red Russia. At the doors of the larger shops stand bearded porters, in faded and tarnished uniforms, of so great an age that no other work may be deputed them. Loud-speakers make their tongues heard on all sides, morning and evening. And there is always the beloved jazz. The centre of fun is to be found at the Hotel Metropole, where the gilded ceiling, the fountains, the coloured tiles, the

palms, are reminiscent of an early Edwardian hydro in the North of England. It is there that the band plays loudest ; that the most highly paid Soviet engineers go for an evening out ; and that Russian blondes point the Soviet policy of race equality by partnering negroes in a wholly indigenous version of the fox-trot. It is there, too, that an *omelette surprise* may be obtained of so fine a quality as to lend an added significance to its name.

Over the whole city hangs an air of restlessness and impermanence, evoked as if by some feverish desire to attain an undefined goal. A length of river-bank is seen to be in the process of demolition ; the centre of a main street is entirely blocked by excavation ; here is a towering blank wall ; there an incomplete addition to an old building ; the eye can scarcely rest for a moment upon a scene which does not suggest destruction, change or renewal. Nor can the ear hope for tranquillity. All day the tram-bells clang, and all night lorries are driven at top speed through the streets to the camps of construction under the arc-lights.

There is no suggestion in Moscow of permanence or the ordered life. The present stage of transition makes it an ill-favoured spot for reflection or consideration. Frames of mind are hardly fashioned in such an atmosphere.

Nor is it possible to be long in the city without becoming oppressed by a sense of menace, of a kind of twilight gloom such as one is sometimes conscious of in England on a still afternoon in early winter. This discomfort is partly caused by the queerness of the surroundings in which the visitor from the West will find himself recognising certain European con-



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ventions, only, at the next moment, to be conscious of other signs, equally strong but almost intangible, which inevitably suggest the East. For the reason that it may not be classified under either East or West, Moscow is by far the strangest capital in Europe, and its people and all their machinations are surrounded with a particular aura of mystery, in Western minds.

It is also the reason of an extraordinary fascination which remains long after the traveller has crossed the Russian frontier, and adds most certainly something to his make-up which is considerably more remarkable than the influence of many other cities.

It might be said that the source of this power is to be found in the Red Square of Moscow, for here national characteristics are most clearly expressed. Decidedly it is in this Square that the keynote may be learnt which builds out of the apparent disorder of the city a symphonic whole.

I came first to the Red Square in the fading evening light. From a cupola on a palace of the Kremlin floated the Red Flag ; upon the spire of a church within the walls of the fortress a great five-pointed star glinted in the unseen sunset ; across the wide cobbled expanse the bareheaded Muscovites hurried belatedly homewards ; there were two sentries on guard outside Lenin's Mausoleum. I had not foreseen the rising road at both ends of the Square which makes the approach enormously impressive, nor the majestic way in which the red battlemented walls of the Kremlin march down to the banks of the River Moskva. I had not foreseen the plantation of dark fir trees on either side of the Mausoleum, beneath which revolutionaries of many countries are allotted a grave, nor had I realised the magnificence of the

tomb itself, fashioned from blocks of black and dark-red marble.

Once it was to the Cathedral of Saint Basil that the steps of pilgrims from all over Russia were directed. Now their backs are turned on that fantastic creation which to-day, unkempt and unadorned, resembles nothing so much as the front of a shabby fair booth, and they are content to stand for perhaps two hours in the queue which every evening stretches the length of the Square, to gaze on the mummified face of the man who is the inspiration of their life.

I too went early to pay my homage. Beside me in the queue were peasants and children, and Red Army men. As we approached the entrance, all removed their hats and there was no more talking. We tramped slowly down the black marble steps and, turning to the right, were suddenly in the high chamber in which Lenin lies.

Bright light shone down on him and at his head and feet stood a Red sentry with bowed head. A casing of glass enclosed him. He lay with his head resting on a scarlet cushion, eyes closed and his face a ghastly khaki shade, only a little paler than the tunic in which he is dressed. His lips were pale and drawn tight and his features had no fulness at all. A scarlet cover draped him from the waist down.

His right hand, pale as a monkey's paw, was clenched in salute ; the tawny hair glistened on its back.

We were hurried past and came out once more under the Kremlin walls. It is said that the Mausoleum will not remain open for very much longer and the official explanation is that the body is drying up and will no longer give a correct impression to the

faithful. By others it is said that the authorities are apprehensive of the superstitious cult which is growing up round the corpse. It is not unknown nowadays to speak of "a quiet time with Lenin," and sick persons are coming to the tomb expecting to be cured of disease. Already pilgrims with sticks or crutches are turned away from the queue, and I myself saw an aged pedlar conducting a brisk trade of Lenin medallions and mementoes which were bought by the devout as they emerged from the tomb.

It is impossible without visiting Russia to realise how constantly the people are reminded of their hero. In every factory and institution are emblazoned phrases from his speeches and writings, and his likeness—in photograph, bust and statue—is everywhere displayed. In the corner of rooms where a lamp and icon formerly hung, a souvenir of Lenin now takes its place, and in Moscow a museum has recently been opened devoted entirely to the story of his life. All relevant papers and relics have been collected (and most admirably arranged), and lectures are given on various aspects of Lenin's life and teaching. The last room in the museum suggests a hall of honour, hushed with ecclesiastical silence and hung with crimson velvet banners draped in crêpe; on the walls are telegrams from all over the world, condoling his death, and at the end of the room raised in the manner of an altar are plaster casts of his head and hands.

Although one may deplore the fetish which surrounds Lenin's memory, one cannot but admire the astonishing personality of the man nor the extraordinary ability which enabled him to inspire and direct the greatest revolution of our time, and in the

space of five years to establish revolutionary principles over one-sixth of the world's surface.

On each of the many occasions I passed through the Red Square during those weeks in Moscow, I never failed to be impressed by the tomb and its surroundings. It was perhaps at night that the Square became most awesome, deserted, and with the moon sailing overhead. The Red Flag, now illuminated by concealed lighting from beneath, floated always from the cupola; behind the dark walls glimmered the churches and the paler palaces, their windows brightly illuminated, and every now and again a bell would ring continuously in the Spasskiya Gate, a red warning light would gleam, and a car bearing, no doubt, some high official would tear across the silent Square and be lost in the city. From a clock within the fortress would come the sound of a cracked bell striking the quarter.

Into the Kremlin itself I was, alas, never permitted to penetrate. Since the murder of Kiroff, visitors have not been welcomed. But even from afar the sight of those bulbous domes and gleaming palaces surrounded by the great red battlemented walls is an unforgettable vision of ancient Russia. And the Mausoleum forms a symbol and an inspiration of the present.

Before telling something of the monuments and institutions which I visited in and near the city of Moscow, it is best to complete this impression of the background against which these visits were made, by sketching in—even though they must remain little more than silhouettes—a few of the inhabitants whom I had the good fortune to meet.

I was surprised at first to find that those who came to call on me presented themselves in my bedroom itself, and only discovered subsequently that such is the general Muscovite custom since the overcrowding (owing to the rapid expansion of the city and the inability to keep pace with the housing) is so intense that no apartment—except for the highly privileged—consists of more than one room for either a single person or a family. Life—and hospitality, perforce—is conducted therefore on bed-sitting-room standards.

Up to my bedroom, then, on an evening soon after my arrival, there came a certain comrade named Ernest. He had, it seemed, come to Moscow four or five years ago to compose poetry and was docketed under the Soviet category of “creative worker.” This meant that his office hours were, naturally, most irregular, and that he had plenty of free time at his disposal. He proceeded to devote almost an hour of it, on the occasion of our first meeting, by declaiming the verse of an esteemed Soviet poet whose works he had translated from the Russian. It seemed to me that they would have made excellent marching-songs for the Boy Scout Movement. There was a lot about “tramping along to the sound of the drum” and “swinging forward together.” There was also a regrettable couplet which rhymed “Eiffel” (Tower of) with “eyeful” (of stars). Poor Ernest was quite worn out by the emotion of the recital and had to be restored with a carafe of vodka. He intimated that chocolate, too, would be nourishing—English chocolate. (Soviet chocolate, he declared, was of course first-rate, but one wanted a change sometimes.) Had I by chance any English chocolate with me?

Unluckily for Ernest I had none left, but I offered him the rest of my barley-sugar and was glad to see that this was much appreciated. Then there was the question of clothes. Both the range and style of Soviet outfitting, Ernest affirmed, were something to marvel at. Nevertheless, if I had any little thing to dispose of—handkerchiefs, shoes, shirts, an overcoat . . .

He delved deeply into all my drawers and made a wide selection, finally carrying away a pair of pyjamas and a much-worn mackintosh for which he was prepared to offer handsomely.

On another occasion Ernest introduced me to “the comrade-prince.” Ernest had taken me to a cinema (the vast hall, incidentally, had been entirely empty of spectators save for Ernest and myself and a couple of old women, knitting), and afterwards I invited him to supper at my hotel. There was some hesitation before he accepted my invitation, Ernest wishing to make it quite plain that he had an abundant board at home and was in no need of a free meal. Nevertheless, he consented to come.

We had scarcely entered the dining-room when Ernest plucked me by the arm, murmuring in awed tones, “Look, the comrade-prince!” quickly explaining that the figure indicated was a member of one of the noblest families of old Russia who had thrown in his lot with the Bolsheviks. The comrade-prince was sitting alone. Beside him on the table stood a stately ice-bucket, clearly a relic of pre-Revolutionary days, but holding in place of the Tsarist champagne of the prince’s lamentable youth a bottle of fizzy lemonade. Against the ice-bucket was propped a copy of *Izvestia*, and I observed that the prince had so far adopted

proletarian manners as to eat his meat off the end of his knife—a feat which it must be said he performed most dexterously. I thought it would be interesting to hear the tale of the prince's conversion to communism and I suggested to Ernest that he might be approached, assuming that in a country of equality there would be no difficulty in the matter of introduction. Whether Ernest considered I was too bourgeois to be owned, or whether, on the other hand, the princely aura, in Ernest's eyes, was still a handicap, I could not tell, but it was with a shamefaced manner that the introduction was effected. Nor did the prince himself display the traditional affability of his kind for as soon as our hands had been shaken he returned once more to *Izvestia* and the fizzy lemonade.

Then there was the American *litterateur*, who assured me that the States were ripening for revolution and that everything in Russia was grand, just grand. He too had to be refreshed with a carafe of vodka and took a fancy, which proved permanent, to a copy of *Abinger Harvest* which I was carefully preserving for myself to read on the way home. Still, he escorted me to one of the workers' saloons on the south side of the river, where, under his direction, I drank beer in the Russian manner, standing at a high table and dipping into the common bowl of salt.

Of Cass Schneider, the young American communist who was reputed to be a powerful force in the theatrical world, I can tell little, since he did no more than poke his head round my bedroom door and say, under beetling brows, that the Soviet theatre was



“vurry, vurry significant.” I was told that he was married to a Chinese wife of great beauty.

Of Bob MacGregor and his wife I would say that of the foreign workers whom I met in Moscow they had by far the most detached point of view. They had worked in Moscow for nearly two years, he as a journalist, she on the construction of the Metro, with sculpture as a side-line, and they had met, married and honeymooned within the borders of the Union. Both were American and in both I detected that particular quality to be found among certain of the best workers in Russia to-day, which I can only call heroism. They were convinced of the great importance of the Russian experiment and of the benefits it was bringing to the people. On the other hand they deplored many of the sidelights which were the fruit of the Russian character, and most of all they deplored the communist doctrine towards aesthetics. Still, Russia to them was “a grand country,” and its people “a grand people.” I was fully prepared to respect their opinion.

It was only because they were young and wanted to see the world while their happiness lasted that they were moving on to China. It was a sad day for me when they sold their typewriter for a ticket on the Trans-Siberian and I shall not forget for a long time our farewell dinner at the Metropole when we each forecast the evolution of Russia in 1986.

It was the MacGregors who took me one evening to the flat of a celebrated journalist, a fellow-countryman of theirs. It was, I remember, a very hot night and we sat out on a balcony high above the city. Under the cover of darkness even the Udarnik block looked

beautiful. With true American hospitality I was pressed to eat what tasted, after weeks of Russian cooking, like the best chocolate cake in the world. Under the official dispensation for journalists, the materials of the cake had been imported from abroad, and they had been cooked by the wife of my host. By any standards it would have been a memorable cake. There were also gramophone records of genuine "swing" music, and the kindest of American voices. What could one ask more?

It was little Luster who took me to the Foreign Workers' Club. The Club occupied premises which had formerly been the mansion of some great family. All the way up the elaborate stone staircase were red banners and portraits of communist leaders in various countries, including that of Harry Pollitt. There were no other decorations. A film was to have been shown with a meeting to follow it, but in the manner of the country the arrangements had fallen through. Instead, we sat in the canteen and drank gassy lemonade and talked to some young American clubmen and clubwomen who had, alternately, very bad and very good manners.

After a bit, little Luster suggested that we should pay a call on a friend of his who wrote film scenarios. Little Luster said his friend was one of the lucky ones and possessed a nice apartment, which he would like us to see.

The apartment was approached across a black courtyard and up a flight of stone stairs, feebly lit. The friend was out when we arrived and the door of his apartment locked, so to pass the time we sat in an adjacent kitchen which was communal to six families. It was the gloomiest kitchen I have ever seen, but

little Luster said it was a very good kitchen and that his friend was very lucky to have the use of it. After an hour of waiting in the kitchen, on which opinions differed, the friend arrived with two other friends, and hospitably ushered us into his apartment.

It consisted of one tiny room and there was scarcely room for the five of us—even sitting on the floor. But everyone else said how fortunate their friend was to have such a nice apartment. (“Look! he has an *eiderdown* and a *radio*, and quite a number of *books*.”) We listened to the radio for a little and then walked the length of Ulitsa Gorki back to bed.

It was little Luster again who took us one evening to the Writers’ Club. An elderly Soviet poet came with us. This Club again was housed in the former town house of a great family—the Orlofsievs—and as on our other excursion to Clubland, a meeting was promised, but had, as was almost to be expected, fallen through. Instead we sat in a little Louis-Quinze drawing-room while the Soviet poet talked about modern Russian folk-lore. He told us that among the peasants a number of beautiful legends and poems were growing up round the figure of Lenin. He recited a number of these poems, which were most interesting. They related how Lenin was looking down from above and watching to see how each Russian communist was doing the best for his country; how a drop of Lenin’s blood was in each of them, stirring them on to fresh endeavour; and how, even when they were tending their sheep, they must not forget their little father, Lenin.

As the poet said, the verses were very, very simple because they were the work of very, very simple

people. There were almost tears in his eyes when he had finished the recital.

When it was over we went downstairs and drank a bottle of soda-water and some rough cider in the canteen. The poet talked a little more—about archæology this time—and after he had tipped the Club waiter and the *garde-robe* attendant, we all jolted back in a tram to the centre of the city.

Another day we were most kindly invited to tea by an eminent Soviet author. His works had been published in England and he enjoyed a wide reputation in his own country. He wore his hair shaved close, large gold-rimmed glasses, a zipp-fastening leather jacket and a mild and scholarly air. It was perhaps on account of his refined appearance that an elaborate joke of his connected with the Blessed Sacrament and the tea and biscuits on the table before us, sounded distinctly out of place. He was, however, most instructive about Russian authors of to-day, and the modern point of view of classical Russian literature. He said that Dostoievsky was only read nowadays by young neurasthenics in America, and when I told him that Chekhov's *Three Sisters* had recently enjoyed a successful run in London he remarked that he supposed the cause of its success was because it echoed the general desire of Londoners to come to Moscow.

Speaking of modern Russian poetry he explained that it was written to be declaimed aloud, not read, and in this connection it was interesting to reflect on the rise of poetic drama in England. He gave a most interesting demonstration by reciting a portion from

Maiokovsky's works and spoke the verse extremely well. He was naturally anxious to hear of revolutionary trends in modern English writing and we discussed this in some detail, though it appeared to him that England in this respect was very backward, compared, for example, to America.

Once more, as we sat quietly talking over our cups of tea, with the author's wife performing her housewifely duties, with the plants on the window-ledge, and the clock on the wall, it occurred to me how great was the disparity between the general idea of communistic personalities—this mild author for instance—and the reality.

Nor were the authorities themselves any more perturbing. Clad in dark double-breasted suits they received us affably enough, and except for a flat refusal to grant permission to visit the Kremlin—which was reasonable enough in the circumstances—they listened to any requests we had to make. It is true that an appointment was scarcely ever kept at the hour decided upon and that all initiative had to come from the visitor himself, but such is the Russian character, and there are compensations. The smaller courtesies which certainly help to make existence run more smoothly were evidently considered by Moscow to be repugnantly bourgeois and one soon learnt to expect none from official circles. One had indeed to face the painful truth that the treatment of visitors was not now rated as very important, since it could only be in the eyes of the very blindest visitors that the experiment was not proving an economic success, and the experimenters could justifiably claim

to have more important work to do than devote its attention to the whims and fancies of the lookers-on.

There was no question, therefore, about hindering the visitor from wandering in the city whenever he felt inclined. The Society for Cultural Relations, known as Voks, had courteously placed at my disposal a guide who as well as proving a well-informed companion was naturally useful in directing me on various visits, but I was perfectly at liberty to wander where I wished and at any time.

It was best of all to have the companionship of E.

Throughout those hectic weeks of early summer in Moscow, I shall always remember with gratitude E.'s imperturbable calm. Russia was even newer to her than it was to me, since she had come straight to Moscow from London and still had the experience of the South before her. But with a hat from Marshall & Snelgrove's on her head and in her hand a bag which always contained at moments of exhaustion a supply of gingerbread biscuits, she remained unruffled either by the universal drabness, which I think she felt more than I, or by the general racket of existence. Without a murmur of protest she fought her way into a tram already so loaded that there were passengers clinging to the buffers, and listened far into the night, with a courtesy seldom reciprocated, to the most outrageous communist rhetoric. The only occasion on which she appeared at all disturbed was after a certain eventful night on which it seemed, first, a road-breaking machine had worked till morning beneath her window; second, a company of cockroaches had invaded her bedroom; and third, a faulty door-fastener had caused a gust of wind to upset an entire jug of water on to the floor of her room.

Together we penetrated the arcaded corridor of the trading rows off the Red Square, and examined the shops in the Kuznetski Most, noting that in the window of one shop the place of honour was occupied by an iron abortion chair, and we went across the river to the Colchoz Renok bazaar, crowded by pathetically ill-dressed comrades queueing for food and clothes. We noticed that though all the goods were of the lowest quality there was plenty of them to be had.

We devoted one day to exploring the commission shops which have antiquities for sale, and the second-hand bookshops. Little of value now remains to be bought of antiques from former private houses and collections, and the prices asked for the raffish collection of furniture, pictures, china and silver which is displayed are merely a cause for merriment. Among the books, on the other hand, bargains may still be found, though their discovery means a lengthy search through faded piles of Ouida, Rhoda Broughton, pre-war copies of the *Quarterly Review*, and the like. I came on a book of drawings illustrating deliciously Russian life in 1820, while E. discovered a first edition of the *Fairchild family*.

My visit to Moscow would indeed have been a grim and arduous undertaking, if, after the serious excursions, after the broken appointments and nerve-racking delays, after talk of norms and statistics, cycloramas and prophylactoria, E. had not been there to discuss the present with wit and equanimity, and, if we felt so inclined, to drive Moscow from the mind by recalling the affairs of Devonshire, the Thompson-Bywaters' case, or a first reading of Charlotte M. Yonge.

## (ii)

The Museum of Revolution was housed in a pink Empire building formerly called the English Club because it had been run on English lines. It consisted of paintings, photographs, models and relics, vividly arranged and calculated to tell the story of the Revolution dramatically to simple people. Our visit took some time, since the guide—a middle-aged woman professionally armed with a billiard-cue—was unwilling to let the significance of each knout and snapshot escape our attention. Still, the collection contained many interesting details. There were some Lenin relics, pages from his notebook, his original revolutionary manifesto, and an impressive photograph of his funeral procession crossing the Red Square in a snowstorm. There was also a photograph of Stalin as a youthful and unshaven revolutionary—marking a strange contrast with the likeness of the burly and jovial figure of to-day ; and I observed a photograph (emphasising the powers of Imperialism in other lands), representing the Bishop of London addressing a company of Territorials from the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral.

The Museum for the Protection of Mother and Child fully exemplified the notable work which is being done in the Soviet Union for child welfare, and an admirable exposition of its aims was given us by the directress. Save for the laudable policy of sex enlightenment in schools, there did not appear to be any strikingly modern methods of education (among the sample toys I saw a wigwam which would have horrified Freud), but we were told that the psychological approach was distrusted ; physical well-



being was of first importance and to that end our attention was directed to a dictum of Stalin displayed on the wall: "We want our children to have muscles of iron and nerves of steel."

When E. enquired what methods of treatment were accorded to the problem child, she was informed that no such children existed under a communist régime, and that, in order to foster the community spirit, no child was ever permitted—as far as possible—to be alone for one moment.

There was the customary discussion on the subject of abortion, practically demonstrated to us by a display of what E. referred to afterwards as "things in bottles," and some light chatter on such subjects as contraceptives and child-birth.

Judging from the Museum and from what I had seen out of Moscow, my general impression was that although no advanced ideas of child welfare were being employed, the crèche system was being systematically introduced, that crèches were rapidly growing in number, and efforts on an extraordinarily wide and thorough scale were being made to provide the young Russian with the finest physique possible.

Zaks, or the Bureau for marriage and divorce, comprised three ground-floor rooms opening immediately off one of the main shopping streets, and a waiting-room adorned with a benevolent portrait of Kalinin, President of the Soviets, and a pot of bedraggled white hydrangeas tied with a bow of white satin. Over each room presided a middle-aged woman of competent appearance, each one dressed in a beret and a faded blouse.

A marriage had just been solemnised when we arrived, and, as if by way of cynical comment, the

happy couple were immediately succeeded by an applicant for divorce.

The newcomer was a night-worker earning, he said, so good a wage that his wife had no need to work and he was able to provide her with fine clothes. Nevertheless she was constantly disagreeable to him, nagging when he came home in the morning, and refusing to cook his food. There was no alternative but to part. A few questions were asked by the woman presiding, a form was filled up, three roubles paid over to the Bureau, and in five minutes the petitioner walked away, a free man.

The next applicant was also seeking a divorce. She was a fat elderly woman, breathless and voluble, and accompanied by a red-haired child. She had her shopping-bag over her arm, evidently considering her visit to the Bureau as merely one of the morning's *courses*. She had been married before and abandoned by her husband, and now, only a year since her second marriage, she had suffered the same treatment. But the man drank, she said, and she wasn't sorry to be rid of him. In a few minutes she, too, was independent.

We were invited to ask any questions of the comrade in charge and received full and intelligent answers.

Marriages cannot be registered before eighteen, but we were assured that intimacy between the sexes was unusual before this age (there is certainly far less sex stimulus in Russia at the present time than in most countries of Europe). Living together, unregistered, has no slur attached to it, but for various reasons, if, for example, the man took up work in a new town, and for the benefit of the children, there are advantages to be gained by official marriage. If a married man has a

child by an unmarried girl, he must pay for the child's upkeep and assume responsibility for it. For a man to have been married and divorced two or three times is not regarded with particular disfavour, but six or seven repetitions is officially disapproved of and may result in the man having considerable difficulty in getting a place in a factory where an enquiry is made into such matters before employment is granted.

Incest, we were told, was practically non-existent and homosexuality very rare. Both were punishable by law.

As to the causes of divorce, incompatibility was the usual reason given and no intimate questions were asked unless absolutely unavoidable. An average case is over in five to ten minutes and a divorce may be given on the request of either party. The father must pay one-third of his wages (deducted at his place of work) for the upkeep of the children ; and if there are more than three children the sum deducted is in proportion to his wage. If the father disputes the paternity of a child he is given one year in which to prove his claim. The children themselves are not consulted as to which parent they prefer to live with. If the father does not consider his children are being brought up properly he can complain to the authorities.

We were informed that there was an official book of law, but that it was seldom consulted, the judges being particularly chosen for their wide experience.

For a simple people, and for an uncomplex peasant mentality, such arrangements sounded excellent, but one cannot help wondering whether it would work satisfactorily with the tangled affairs of the more sophisticated. Marxists would answer that in the ideal State there would be no reason for temperaments

and tangles. Is it not possible, however, that the universal prosperity promised by the Marxists themselves would not cause temperamental conflicts in just the same way as they are caused in the more prosperous circles of the capitalist world? Russia is as yet far from achieving either universal prosperity or sophistication. But with the former will come the latter and an accompanying variation and elaboration of the social code. It is all to the good, however, that the beginnings are being made on the lines of common-sense.

The exclusion and prohibition of all Christian teaching—when I asked a prominent communist what would happen if a mother attempted to tell her child about God, he replied: “The child would simply think his mother was mad”—has naturally simplified the formation of the social code and ridded an unnaturally superstitious people from a number of unhealthy complexes; but the methods with which this has been done would hardly turn a professing Christian of average intellectual powers into an agnostic. I am judging at least from the example set by the Central Anti-Religion Museum in Moscow.

The former Convent of the Passion has been selected to serve this purpose and a small charge was made for admission (except on the day of rest, when visitors were allowed in free). The organised denial of Christianity was all based on material assumptions, the Darwinian theory being fully demonstrated, together with some elementary diagrams of the moon and stars. There were also the usual unpleasant skeletons of priests, and frogs, and a great many icons

—innocent enough to all appearances, but no doubt full of significance to the initiated. An occasional Italian picture was also on view, but they were mainly of the Beccafumi School and had no great interest.

Life-size wax models of old popes manufacturing icons by the light of a reddened electric bulb, gave a Madame Tussaud air to the exhibition ; and the Bishop of London was again present, still addressing Territorials from the steps of St. Paul's ; there were also some quaint old oleographs representing a flight of Teutonic angels watching over the cradle of the late Tsarevitch. They represented, of course, the malevolent unity of Church and Crown.

One of the chief institutions which has given Russia a reputation for being the land of Social Experiment has been the community outside Moscow known as Bolshevo. The general impression of Bolshevo outside Russia is that it is a prison for hardened criminals, conducted under such enlightened conditions that the old "lags" beg to remain within its walls, and that all Russian prisons are modelled on similar lines.

Actually, it is a reformatory for young delinquents (the age of admittance is from ten to twenty-two), who are mostly guilty of thieving, though an occasional young murderer is included, and no political prisoners are confined there. (It is hardly likely that their "cold cells" would be on view.) Much was made of the fact that the members of the commune who arrive as criminals frequently choose to marry and settle in the community ; but if, as is likely, a crowded apartment house in Moscow is the alternative, I am scarcely surprised that they choose life at Bolshevo

Garden City, amid the pine-trees. Besides, a day trip to Moscow is permitted after three months' residence.

It is true that these happy prisoners are expected to do some work, and they are employed in weaving and making tennis racquets, but for this they are paid a wage which, in turn, goes to provide for their board and lodging.

The community buildings included a hospital, over which we were conducted, boasting, of course, the inevitable abortion room. This last inspired a heated argument among two French ladies, new to Russia but proudly claiming allegiance to *Les Amis de l'Union Soviétique*, as to technical details, and such a phrase as : "*Mais six mois après la conception il est déjà un grand garçon*" rose loudly on the air.

No feature of the place was kept from us, not even the art gallery, in which pride of place was given to an unflattering daub, featuring Lady Astor and Bernard Shaw on their visit to Bolshevo. We were even invited up into the prisoners' dormitories.

The sexes were divided, but it was emphasised that no exception was taken to the closest intimacy. The walls of the young women's dormitories (they slept fourteen to a room) were pinned over with photographs of acrobats and hung with *balalaikas*. Some of the girls came in to entertain us, and when asked in as casual and polite a manner as possible the reason for their stay at Bolshevo, usually replied in equally polite and casual tones : " Oh, for stealing " or " for stabbing." Presently some young men strolled in and proceeded to give a display of dancing.

In the whole community there were no guards to be seen and no feeling of any subordination or concealment. I enquired whether any psychological treatment

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was given to newly-arrived prisoners, and was told that such treatment had formerly been given but was now abandoned since it suggested "superiority" on the part of the psychologist. The prisoners were judged by their fellows and justice meted out accordingly.

As far as suggesting new methods in prison reform Bolshevo did not impress me favourably, indeed, I was shocked to see boys of twelve and fourteen working in the factories—it was explained that they were unsuited to school life and had to be disciplined—and to hear that the inmates have their rights of citizenship removed for three years and are liable to be recruited into the army.

But, as an example of a commune, Bolshevo is extremely interesting, and the self-governing lines and code of rough justice on which it is run clearly works successfully for a simple people. Small wonder that it is one of the chief show-pieces of modern Russia.

The word "culture" is so frequently upon the lips of the young Russian of to-day, and its values so often discussed, that I paid a visit one morning to one source of this desirable acquisition, the State Publishing Office. There are, in fact, various branches of the Office, all under State direction: the one which I visited was responsible for the output of poetry, the classics and fiction, and was under the direction of one who had obviously been trained in Germany.

Concerning Soviet methods of book publishing I learnt that announcements of forthcoming books were supplied to the State-controlled bookshops in much the same manner as in England, a short description or

“ blurb ” being given in the case of important books or new novels. An important exception to the English rule, however, was that subscribers placed their orders with their organisations, which, in turn, communicated them to the bookseller, so that the publisher knew how many copies of the book to print, thus avoiding waste copies. A selection committee of men and women—most of them editors of papers and journals—chose the manuscripts, and the authors were paid in advance, according to the number of “ points,” including dashes, full stops, commas, etc., in their work. (Is this the reason for the length of the average Russian novel ?) For 40,000 “ points ” a payment of 400 to 600 roubles was made, and a royalty of 60 per cent was given after 10,000 copies had been sold.

Owing to the great size of Russia and the coming of education to places where, twenty years ago, the inhabitants had been illiterate, the publishing figures were almost unbelievably large. In one year the particular department which I visited published 25–30 million books ; it employs a staff of 400 ; it has 23 printing depots ; and hopes to increase its output to 50 million books in two years’ time. In a single year 8 million copies of Pushkin’s works were sold and the demand is far from being satisfied. There are 50,000 large public libraries in the Union and 130,000 smaller ones, and a third of the books sold are bought by these organisations. A new novel costs three roubles and it is produced in the style of its French equivalent, but with stiffer boards. Twenty per cent of the modern authors are women.

I was told that several English books had been translated into Russian and proved very popular,



Conrad and Galsworthy being most read. Aldous Huxley also enjoyed a public with *Point Counter Point* as the favourite. Following a dramatised version of *The Pickwick Papers* there had been a vogue for Dickens, and both *Hard Times* and *Dombey and Son* had secured large sales.

Certain American authors also enjoyed popularity, particularly Dreiser and Dos Passos. Hemingway's *Siesta* was much discussed, though he was not as yet as popular a writer as Dreiser.

The State has, of course, the complete monopoly of book publishing and nothing can appear in print unless it is officially sanctioned, nor may any book be imported from abroad without being scrutinised. The people may only read what is prescribed for them. Still, it is clear that the prescription is taken eagerly and by all the patients.

*Pravda*, meaning Truth, is the official organ of the Russian Communist Party and, as befits the Party newspaper in a one-party country, it is produced in impressive surroundings. Opposite the office buildings was a block of dwellings for the workers, complete with restaurant and theatre, and the works themselves were housed in an up-to-date casing of concrete, glass and steel. The interior was sumptuously, even ornately furnished, with conference halls of lapis lazuli and malachite, and editorial rooms fitted with bedrooms and shower baths.

The circulation of the paper, to my surprise, was under two million and I was told that only shortage of paper prevented that number from being doubled. The circulation of *Izvestia*, incidentally, is 10,000 less.

*Pravda* has a staff of 3000, and the average wage to unskilled workmen is 235 roubles per month ; to skilled workers 350-550. Matrices are sent by air so that articles from *Pravda* may be set up in provincial papers.

The printing shops appeared to be light and well arranged, but as we were too early to see them in action it was suggested that we might care—since E. was with me—to visit the editress of the *Woman Worker*, a paper published under the auspices of *Pravda* and enjoying a large circulation.

The editress was just finishing her afternoon glass of tea, but she welcomed us warmly and begged us to join her in a second glass. She was a very stout woman with rough, good-humoured peasant features, and a vast bun of golden hair. She was attired in a blue schoolgirl's tunic. Her manner was boisterous and loquacious and she pressed upon each of us a copy of her paper, commenting tirelessly on each feature as we turned the pages.

✓ The *Woman Worker* appeared to cater equally for the pioneering woman and for the stay-at-home. It contained, for example, both instructions (fully illustrated) for physical drill and inset jumper patterns *à la Weldon's Journal*. There were contributions from leading women in farm and factory as well as beauty hints and domestic tips, and on the page preceding the serial was an article, with photographs, on the correct use of the gas-mask. The serial was entitled : " The Adventures of Marina," and recounted the courtship of a blonde factory worker with a young (and handsome) Red Air lieutenant. (From a hasty perusal at a subsequent instalment I satisfied myself that the courtship passed to the customary stages. The pot of white

hydrangeas tied with a white satin bow was not actually illustrated, but one was led to conclude that Marina had been successfully led to the marriage bureau.)

The editress sent for fresh glasses of tea, and poured out from her lips a flow of talk. She said women in Russia were the most independent in the world and, pointing to her own plump fingers, showed us that she wore no wedding ring, although she had been married fifteen years, since it would, of course, imply that she was a slave to her husband.

Then, as an example of the part which women were playing in the life of the community, the editress related an anecdote which appeared to me to have some significance. She said that, now conditions were so much easier and wages were increasing, many women who were married to highly-paid workers, such as engineers, found that there was no need to work themselves. Nor was there sufficient occupation for them at home, since their children were away all day at crèche or school, and the housework in their small apartments was soon done. Several of these women, said the editress, even employed other comrades for a few hours a day to help with the housework. As a result of their lack of proper occupation these women had taken to thinking of nothing but their clothes and appearance—"useless fancies," declared the editress sternly. Some, however, realising the errors into which they were falling and conscious that they were proving of small service in building up the social order, decided to go in deputation to Stalin and enquire how their leisure might most profitably be spent.

"They went to Stalin and they got their answer," declared the editress with a calm assurance. "They were told to go home and beautify their houses with

embroidery and to decorate the walls of workers' clubs ! ”

What a vision of genteel industry ! One scarcely likes to dwell too long on a picture of Moscow's most *élite* apartments, with their table-centres and dressing-table runners, egg cosies and crocheted matting, together perhaps with the family copy of *Capital* in its home-made dust-cover of coloured wools in a hammer and sickle design. Can it really be that at the Celebrations attending the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution a delegation of engineers' wives will march in raffia sandals bearing a cornucopia brimming over with barbola fruit ?

I cannot imagine Frumkina, the director of Radio Moscow, ever permitting herself to fall into such bourgeois habits. Appropriately enough for one in her position she was thoroughly aware of Russia's reputation in the eyes—and the ears—of the world ; and, I am certain, performed the task of tempering the voice of revolution most competently. She spoke six languages herself, was learning Chinese, and appeared to have travelled in every country in Europe, speaking of pre-War visits to what she referred to as “ *Londres la brumeuse*.” She possessed, besides, an excellent sense of humour. When we had been talking for some time she remarked :

“ You have come to Russia to learn our secrets of course. Nobody must ever leave Russia without taking home a secret. It just isn't done. Very well, I will disclose to you a secret—a highly confidential secret of the Third International ! ”

There was a dramatic pause.

“ It is this. When I, Frumkina, am announced to speak at the microphone, on three occasions in the

year, it is not my voice that you hear, but the voice of my youthful assistant ! ” And she laughed delightedly at her disclosure.

Discussing my visit to Moscow she said she supposed I had been taken to admire the new Moscow Hotel. And before I had time to answer, and to say that it seemed to me an unfortunate building, she exclaimed :

“ Pooh ! *c’est dans le style de ma grand’mère*. They’ve hardly begun to make Moscow the great city it must one day be. They have still to learn, but they are learning fast—you will see.”

She told me something of the Russian broadcasting system and the details of the programmes. In Moscow itself there are three stations and sixty-three more in various parts of the Soviet Union which broadcast in eighty languages. There are special programmes for collective farms ; an hour of daily culture for the benefit of the Red Army ; and once a month broadcasts to the Arctic when relations of workers in the Far North are invited to use the microphone. Every morning, as well as in the evening, there is a programme for children (an extract from *Pickwick* was to be read to the children on the day of my visit). Programmes begin at 8.30 a.m. and appeared to contain a high proportion of gramophone records.

Frumkina enquired whether I was a regular listener to Radio Moscow, and I replied that on the few occasions when I had tuned in the programme invariably consisted of a voice monotonously extolling the virtues of a newly-built bridge or a gloomy recital of statistics. I confessed that I found such propaganda tedious.

Frumkina smiled as I used the word propaganda, and she advised me to listen to the opera from the

Bolshoi Theatre, which, she said, would remind me of the beauties of the U.S.S.R. Before I left, Frumkina took me over the studios, of which there were three, and we watched a rehearsal in progress of a Gogol play.

The headquarters of Radio Moscow (it occupied half a corridor in the former Foundlings' Hospital, now the centre of the Trades Unions) could not be said to compare with the wonders of Broadcasting House. Nevertheless, in Frumkina, its director, I recognised the only *femme du monde* (or *homme du monde* for that matter) that I had met among the Muscovites.

On every sixth day there is a lull in the Experiment and the people of Russia enjoy a Day of Rest. They rise later, they have meat for the midday meal, and they put on their best suits. The more fortunate Muscovites leave the city in lorry-loads for a day in the country, some to fish, others to sit in circles and discuss endlessly the political situation. Those who remain in the city go, in summer, to the suburban woods of Sokolniki or to the Gorki Park of Rest and Culture. One Day of Rest I took the Metro and went with them to the Park.

Perhaps I had heard too much of the Park from enthusiastic Russians and their almost equally enthusiastic English partisans. Judging by the designation of the Park I had at least anticipated bosky avenues, with perhaps a replica (on a smaller scale, no doubt) of the Boboli Gardens, or a hint or two of Greece, with possibly, in a remote annexe, a spot of Luna Park. But I was sadly disappointed.

The entrance to the Park resembled that of a football ground in a second-rate English provincial town. It was constructed of wood, from which the paint peeled, and across the top, with an air of petty gaiety, fluttered a row of small red flags. Within, outlined in electrical bulbs, were the words : "Life, comrades, has become more joyous in the Soviet Union." This optimistic statement, in its immediate surroundings, seemed to me to ring a little hollow. In a flower-bed below was a likeness of Stalin picked out in lobelias.

The comrades, looking shabby but contented enough, wandered in herds along the dusty pathways, which were shaded at long intervals by half-grown trees and flanked by plaster-casts of famous statuary cast on an absurdly small scale. At a spot where four paths converged was a pond, in the centre of which stood a colossal female, nude, in bronze, brandishing an oar.

The Park was bounded on one side by the river and on the other by trees, but, blocking the view of these natural and, to me, attractive boundaries, had been erected a line of shoddy wooden halls, booths and stalls, garishly painted.

The most commendable institution was a play-room and little garden for children, who could be left while their parents sought the promised alternatives of rest or culture. The children themselves were being treated to a marionette show, which I found as enthralling as did the audience. In another part older children were painting, amid scenes of indescribable confusion, in charge of a single harried woman, whose only method of correction appeared to be to throw a bucket of water over the head of a particularly



# MOSCOW

- (i) *Entrance to the Park of Rest and Culture.*
- (ii) *A cinema hoarding on the façade of the Convent of the Passion.*





naughty child. Others, more studious, were engaged in chess, out of doors, while, over all, a loudspeaker blared out the disillusion of Noel Coward's "Twentieth-century Blues."

It did not seem that the Park offered any opportunities for rest, nor indeed that its visitors were inclined to secure it. Those who were not promenading the dusty pathways were playing vigorous games of net-ball, while others were engaged in fencing.

As for culture, that appeared to be represented in one of the wooden halls by an exhibition of water-colours, in the style of Edwardian lady sketchers, of various seaside Soviet resorts. A reading-room adjoining—cheerless as a station waiting-room—offered papers and magazines.

At another hall it was announced that a circus (with performing fleas) would take place at a time unspecified, and close by, at a cinema built after the style of an Arctic hut, a Wild West film was billed.

But there were none of the proper features of a Prater—no Big Wheel, no scenic railway, no harum-scarum, not even a water-shoot. And there was neither rest nor culture. The best that the Park could offer, in the way of fun, was the parachute-jumping tower ; and that, as well as having warlike intentions, held dangers, even in days of peace, since I came on a crowd gathered at the foot to stare at an unlucky comrade who had severely damaged his ankle as the result of a miscalculated landing.

Parachute-jumping is entirely a Russian speciality, and I had seen towers erected for the sport as far south as Erivan. The jumper is not, as might be imagined, launched into mid-air at the end of his parachute, but, with the parachute already opened,

is lowered on a string, the speed of his descent depending on the amount of skill he possesses in landing. Undoubtedly, in making the people parachute- and therefore air-minded, the sport fulfils a useful function, and there is often a certain grace about the swinging figure, except in the case of the very plump woman who took fright on her descent, screamed to be halted, and hung suspended in mid-air with a length of kicking, black stocking very prominent.

Otherwise, I found the Park of Rest and Culture a dull place, which failed to fulfil its promises.

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Before telling of the arts in Moscow, as represented by pictures in galleries or the theatre and the cinema, it is essential to describe the development of artistic tendencies and the path which they are taking under the present system.

Before the War visitors to Russia from Western Europe did not expect to find, except in the small minority of persons governing the country, a standard of civilisation comparable to that in his own land, but the visitor of to-day, learning of the new freedom, the growing success of the second Plan, the new moral code, the progressive thought, the widespread education, and remembering perhaps it was a ballet troupe of Russian dancers which electrified the artistic worlds of Paris and London, together with the sensation of the Soviet films of a few years back, may well arrive in the Union eagerly expecting that a country which has effected a revolution to rid itself of the old traditions will express a revolutionary aspect in material form of concrete and glass, stone and bronze, oil paint

and grease paint, silk and cotton, pen and pencil, with ballet shoe and musical score, on celluloid and screen.

For a few years immediately after the Revolution there was much activity among artists and some exciting work inspired by the Revolution was produced. Lunacharski, then Commissar for Education and an intimate of Lenin, sent for the advanced architects of Western Europe, and buildings by Le Corbusier and others were erected in Moscow, while from Russia itself came the impressive design for the Lenin Mausoleum. The theatres, though suffering at that time from the general financial stress, were experimenting with new expressionistic production which was in a true sense "revolutionary," and those who looked to Russia to build a new world, as well as to create a new way of living, were filled with expectant hopes for the future.

On my way to Moscow I had seen nothing in the way of new architecture which could be described as even contemporary in its standards to modern Europe, except the theatre at Rostov, but I attributed this mainly to lack of funds, and I expected to hear, when I arrived in the capital, of designs and projects which were to be carried out in a style which might be called "advanced."

I found, on the contrary, that progressiveness in the world of art was sternly and officially discouraged. The reason was this. Artistic development was recently felt to be going too far for the appreciation of the people as a whole, and since, owing both to advancing prosperity and the fear of a fascist attack, the wishes of the people are expressed more and more loudly these days in Government affairs, a change had been decreed in cultural policy.

“ Formalism,” it was announced, must go ; “ Realism ” shall take its place. This meant that all artistic manifestation, which had previously been proudly labelled as “ revolutionary ” or “ modern,” had to disappear.

It meant that the works of the former “ Lef ” School of painters, which were influenced by Picasso and the modern French School, were banished to a ground floor of the Tretyakov Gallery, and the artists themselves either took to *photo-montage* on magazines, such as *U.S.S.R. in Construction* (which was destined for consumption by the Western world), or changed their style to reproduce on factory fresco the buxom Soviet mother suckling the Soviet child. Other artists, who had friends to support them, escaped to Paris and are painting there. A young Soviet sculptor, considered to be of considerable promise, visited England a short time ago and had a piece of work purchased by the Tate Gallery. He refused other offers from private collectors, saying he preferred to keep the rest of his work for his own country, but on returning to Moscow found that his style came under the “ formalist ” ban, and he is now without even a studio.

Shostakovitch, whose opera, *Lady Macbeth*, was performed in London and in other European capitals, likewise suffered the official ban and was requested to compose no more music until he had made an intensive tour of factories and collective farms. The cultural edict has strongly influenced the theatre, and famous producers have been beating their breasts in repentance of their former “ formalist ” errors. Following the demands for Realism, spectacle has been widely introduced. Real horses, drawing full-sized farm waggons, lumber across the stage ; elaborate

scenery, costumes and lighting effects, are all emphasised.

The same movement is making its mark on the cinema. The latest and most popular film, at the time of my visit to Moscow, was entitled *Circus*, directed by Alexandrov, who paid a recent visit to Hollywood, and had clearly introduced many supposedly American features into his picture. The story was one of circus life, with a constant accompaniment of jazz-blaring energy to satisfy the modern Russian craze, a troupe of dancing girls *à la* Goldwyn (but with none of their pep), top-hatted ring-masters and a suite of luxurious apartments which, judging by the view from its spacious roof-garden, was apparently situated within a stone's-throw of the Red Square.

The introduction of features from the capitalist life was apparently justified by an incident (soon lost to sight as the film progressed) showing the misalliance of a white girl with a negro, her consequent expulsion from America, and her warm welcome in the free-thinking Soviet Union.

Even the eminent Soviet author, Alexei Tolstoi, has been in danger of official displeasure on account of his biography of Peter the Great, which the Union of Writers wished to ban, and it was only a chance word of personal approval from Stalin which permitted its publication. Its subsequent success no doubt threw the Union of Writers into some confusion.

No wonder, then, that the newly-erected statues of Soviet Youth, which I had seen outside the rest-homes of the Crimea, had been supplied with full-sized tennis racquets; no wonder that their counterparts in Moscow were draped discreetly; no wonder that the newest buildings had friezes of Sicilian pots, and that

rugs in Armenia have portraits revealing every hair on the hand. I fell to wondering whether there was not perhaps some connection between nineteenth-century taste in England at the time of the Industrial Revolution and that in the Russia of to-day. As one enthusiastic Muscovite remarked to me : " Architecture and all that are only the frills. It's the Plan which counts."

Still, I could not help thinking of the monstrous legacy of England's Industrial Revolution and it seemed to me regrettable that Russia, conducting her own, under nobler conditions of labour, should be faced in a hundred years' time with such unworthy mementoes.

Still, the ban on " formalism " had one fortunate aspect to me at least, since it apparently included the icons in the Tretyakov Galleries, and meant that I had the rooms containing these treasures entirely to myself.

While the guide chattered about " aristocratic features " and " the art of feudalism " I dwelt on the lovely lines of the historic Our Lady of Vladimir, reputed to have been brought by Vladimir Monomakh from Constantinople.

Lovelier still was Roublev's *Trinity*, which has been called, by one\* more schooled in such matters than I, " the greatest masterpiece ever produced by a Slav painter "—an early fourteenth-century work formerly lodged in the Troitskaya Monastery. Against a background of dull gold three angels are seen in robes of pale olive green and a strange shimmering blue. The group is one of complete and perfect harmony.

\* Robert Byron in *First Russia Then Tibet*.



ROUBLEV'S "TRINITY"

*"The greatest masterpiece ever produced by a Slav painter."*





In the room containing the works of the so-called Moscow School (otherwise undistinguished) hung a dark Virgin of the seventeenth century, from Tolscag, close to Yaroslav, but painted in the south and showing unmistakable Italian influence ; two small cherubs, for instance, bear up the canopy over the Virgin's head, in the Venetian manner. There was also a remarkable fourteenth-century *Pieta*—all bones and shadow—from Spasisvil Kreiveli (no catalogue was available, nor was any reliable information to be obtained, so I am very uncertain about the correct spelling of this and other names).

Two works by a fourteenth-century artist, Feofan Grek, seemed remarkably interesting and stood out from the rest, with their awkward adoption of the Byzantine mode, by having a distinctive and very pleasing style of their own. Their subjects were a *Transfiguration* and *The Death of the Virgin*.

By the end of the seventeenth century Russian painting was clearly in a decline. The art of the icon continued, but the size of the picture had dwindled to suit private devotions, while a strong Persian influence—with its emphasis on more detail and a small-pattern design—prevailed.

Then, all of a sudden as it seemed, the old Russia vanished altogether. Stepping across a passage, into a room of eighteenth-century works, one was in a familiar, or almost familiar, European world of wigs and velvets, and portraits of Court beauties. Yet the style and the subjects were not wholly of the West. The artists were still Russian, only they had been sent, under Peter the Great's direction, to France and to Italy in order to acquire the modern manner. The

results were not prosperous. French painters (of no great merit) were brought to the Court of Russia, and their works stand out from those of their Russian contemporaries by being at least civilised. Levitski, by his competence, attained a distinction of his own, among these feeble imitations of his fellow-countrymen. But Russian painting was dead.

I came to the rooms of nineteenth-century art and found them crowded with visitors. Every picture told a story (they bore such titles as: "An ill-assorted pair"; "Fanatics burning themselves"; "The doctor's waiting-room," and "Convicts feeding pigeons from the barred windows of their railway-carriage") and the plainer the story the larger the crowd. A winner was Repin's gigantic illustration of Ivan the Terrible stabbing his son in a welter of blood. Realism could go no further. Here the crowd was thickest.

The Gallery of Western Art represents the combined private collections of Morosov and Schutenkin assembled, naturally, before the Revolution, and to it have been added a few nineteenth-century French pictures formerly in collections in Moscow, Lenin-grad and other parts of Russia. The importance of the gallery can hardly be estimated. It contains, for example, a collection of Matisse's unrivalled in their excellence, and boasts altogether fifty works of Picasso. The gallery itself, built to accommodate the collection of one person, is inadequate in its provision of space for the large number of paintings it holds at present, and I was informed that many pictures have to remain in the cellars. But attempts have been made to make the best of present conditions. The

walls have been hung with a plain canvas and the pictures arranged with good sense.

The first room is devoted to Degas, and Monets of the late period. A pastel by Degas, of four ballet girls observed from a brilliant angle, is full of an enchanting grace.

Renoir is fully represented, but by nothing of very remarkable interest. Cézanne, on the other hand, fills a room with diverse and fascinating subjects. His *Mardi Gras* occupies the position of honour, but he is seen at his most characteristic in landscapes of gracious trees and sunny villages painted in tones of tawny brown and sea-green. There are two interesting still-life studies of flowers by Cézanne. One is treated realistically and the other—a bouquet—is arranged geometrically. An unfinished portrait of a *Woman in Blue*, who wears a tricorne, shows a geometrical trend.

In each room a short biography of the artist was pinned to the wall, together with his portrait, and an illustration of his background. Cézanne, for example, had been allotted a photograph of the Paris Exhibition of 1889, and in the Gauguin room had been placed two or three examples of negro sculpture. I could see no traces of the labels which a few years ago had designated, for instance, the works of Van Gogh, as the *Art of the Small Bourgeoisie*, and those of Cézanne as symbolising the *Age of the Preliminary Period of Imperialism*.

There were Gauguins of the early period when he was influenced by Van Gogh, such as *The Café at Arles*, with a curious almond-eyed peasant woman, and his pear-shaped self-portrait of 1890, as well as a number of gorgeous Tahiti scenes, such as the lovely *Te Tiaka Takani*, with its red oleanders and languorous

natives with their sculptured Egyptian-like limbs ; and a pattern of bright birds, called *Tahiti Pastorelle*.

Toulouse-Lautrec was represented by a delightful sketch of Yvette Guilbert, and then came Van Gogh. The pleasantest work of his was *After Rain*—a bright green and scarlet landscape, traversed by a train, with, in the foreground, a gig on a wet and shining road. His *Prisoners' Walk*, adapted from a drawing of Doré, and his portrait of the Asylum Doctor were both of the St. Remy period.

The largest room in the gallery contained a diverse collection from Rousseau (there were four examples of the Douanier's work, including the *Animals in a Wood*, with its remarkable tones of green) to Derain, with his swirling pine-trees and geometrical villages.

But the most spectacular sight of all was the Matisse room. At either end hung a large panel, specially commissioned by Morosov, representing *Music* and *The Dance*, brilliant compositions of scarlet figures ; *The Artist's studio*—a very large canvas—appeared another triumph of composition and colouring, and a portrait of a Moroccan, in brightest green, was a magnificently effective painting.

After the drabness in the streets without, the colour of Matisse seemed unforgettably splendid.

But a sight of the Picassos alone make a visit to Moscow remarkable, though by no means were all fifty on view. *The Girl on the Ball*, painted in 1904, was undoubtedly the finest, and close to it hung a superb portrait of a Spanish woman. (It was fascinating to mark the influence of Greco and Toulouse-Lautrec.) Several examples of his early Cubist period were exhibited, and best represented by a bowl of cone-shaped fruits, in colour of palest green, grey and

brown. There was also a very successful guitar and violin "construction" (1912), at which the guide could scarcely control her giggles.

A small cabinet adjoining contained paintings by such artists as Miro and Dofy, once hailed as "revolutionaries," but now officially discredited by the Party. (Miro's surrealist work provoked guffaws of laughter from my escort—a very proper reaction for a well-trained citizen of the new Russia.) Her fellow-comrades had marked their dislike of the mistrusted "Formalism" within the gallery by merely staying away from it (on the three occasions of my visits there I never encountered more than half a dozen others), nor was there any catalogue available to afford a reminder of such unhealthy manifestations.

The little Theatrical Museum, on the south side of the river, has a collection of pictures, designs and relics which appeared, judging by its complete emptiness, to be as little appreciated by the progressive Muscovites as the Gallery of Western Art. The collection had been the life-work of a certain Varuchin, described in contemporary language as "a rich merchant" who had been permitted by the Soviets to remain as custodian of the museum until his death in 1929.

There was a fascinating array of eighteenth-century theatrical designs, most of them the work of the Italian artist, Gonzago, who was brought to the Court of Russia by Catherine the Great. Later designs, of the nineteenth and twentieth century, were even more interesting. Here was Golovin's original setting for Diaghileff's production of *Boris Goudunov*, many of Benois' designs for *Petrouchka* and for *Uncle Vanya*, and model stages set for early Soviet productions.

Downstairs, in rooms which were opened to us with small enthusiasm, were many relics of the Ballet.

Here were the tiny pink ballet shoes of Pavlova, and many photographs of her ; designs and sketches by Bakst and Fokine ; a painting of Njinsky ; drawings of Petipa productions ; a striking portrait of Taglioni as a *sylphyde* in partnership with a Scotch laird wearing kilt and plaid ; original designs for *Giselle* ; and many drawings and souvenirs of Fanny Elssler.

Under a glass case I detected a particularly sumptuous theatre programme bearing the double eagle. It was a souvenir of a gala performance of ballet, held in honour of the crowning of Tsar Nicholas II.

Much has been written, and deservedly, upon the Russian theatre, and I shall make no attempt to dwell on technicalities, which are best left to experts, nor to describe the training-schools run in connection with the theatres, save to remark that to the admirable policy of their maintenance must be due the incomparable unity displayed in Russian productions. The great enthusiasm for the theatre, and the enterprise of the productions, is as striking a feature of life in Moscow to-day as it has always been. There can be no doubt, however, that under the present régime it enjoys more encouragement and more opportunities for growth than it ever had before. Actors and actresses, as well as receiving salaries as high as any in the Union, are honoured by the State as public figures. Nor is theatrical activity confined to the large towns. Companies from Moscow are sent to play at remote factories and collective farms, and

though some may say that such a policy smacks of *panem et circenses*, it is only necessary to speak to a Russian on the theatre or to attend a performance to realise that there is something latent in his nature which makes the theatre more of a necessity to him than an interest. The brilliant work of the special theatres for children, and their great success, ensures that the tradition of the theatre will be carried on into the future.

The first Arts' Theatre of Moscow has a reputation greater and more romantic than any other theatre in the world. It was with, I trust, a proper respect that I found myself seated one evening in the third row of its stalls.

The play was *The Cherry Orchard*; the producer, Stanislavski; Chekhov's widow, Chekhova, was playing the part of Madame Ranevsky. I could not have been more fortunate.

It was realistically produced in the old tradition of the theatre: frogs croaked, birds sang, the sun rose and set. The beauty of the scene in the wood was perfect. It was like a picture by Monet, as Anya and Varya lay among the hay in the twilight, with Trofimov, "the eternal student," pacing up and down in a glimmering white suit. Chekhova herself, in her trailing chiffon gowns, her lace handkerchiefs, her parasol, seemed to exemplify perfectly all the charming qualities of the old Russia and all its fatal faults. Her indecisions, her warm-heartedness, her sudden gaiety, her sense of fatality and of melancholy, must end, inevitably, one felt, with the passing of Madame Ranevsky and her kind. It seemed almost unbearable to know the end of the story before the actual participants.



The *tempo* of the play was faultlessly accomplished, since Russian actors are trained to remain acting their part, however minor it may be, as long as they are on the stage and notwithstanding the fact that they have no further contribution to make to the action. The humour of the play never failed to be expressed, and farce was deliciously personified by the antics of the German governess with her little woolly dog and her parlour tricks.

One who came with me, and had seen a pre-Revolution performance of the play at the same theatre, said, significantly, that the moving sound of the snapping harp-string had quite lost its power, since, owing to the shuffling of the proletarian audience, the string had to be snapped with such emphasis that the æthereal quality was gone.

The gentleness and allusiveness of *The Cherry Orchard* certainly did not seem to accord with the heartiness of modern Russia. Nevertheless, the house was crowded and the play greeted with warm appreciation.

*Aristocrats*, on the other hand, was a play of the times, and appeared to reflect a characteristic aspect of modern Russian thought. The play has enjoyed nearly a year's run in Moscow and was being played all over the provinces. I was told I should be certain to enjoy it.

The story concerned the building of the White Sea Canal by the prisoners of the State, and at the opening of the play various types of counter-revolutionaries are seen arriving at the camp. There is an intellectual (in steel spectacles) ; an engineer guilty of sabotage ; a couple of thieves ; a prostitute or two ; a *procureuse* ; a peasant woman convicted of burning a collective

farm ; a nun who shot a young Pioneer ; a drug addict. It is winter and snowing. Men in blue masks tear across the stage, scattering actors and audience with white confetti. At first the prisoners refuse to work, lying about picturesquely thrumming guitars and playing cards, but one by one they are sent for by the noble Cheka officer who, over glasses of tea and cigarettes, gradually talks each one over until he sees the great service he is doing to the State by reforming his ways and digging the Canal.

In the final tableau all are seen grouped under the Red Flag, their faces washed, neatly dressed in overalls or white cotton skirts and testifying (in the manner of the Oxford Groups) how each was saved by the ideals of Soviet Communism. The engineer's aged mother (a comic character with black gamp) weeps with joy to see her son's regeneration ; the male thief kisses the female thief to a slow fox-trot ; there is much horse-play as the play ends, and the audience cheer wildly.

Although I was assured by an intellectual English critic of the Soviet stage that *Aristocrats* " breathes the spirit of the old moralities," I could not put from my mind a performance at a Girl Guide display which I once had the misfortune to attend. The jolly fun and the high moral tone gave them much in common.

*Romeo and Juliet* (Soviet Russian version) was surprisingly effective. The only concession to contemporary ideology came at the opening, when, in dumb show, the servants of the rival houses were seen to fraternise and so emphasise that the quarrel was only between the governing class. The nurse, in accordance with the Russian love of boisterousness, shouted and spat and romped in a way foreign to her native stage, but the Church—as represented by Friar Lawrence—

was treated in no untoward fashion, the friar, indeed, appearing as his usual kindly self. A revolving stage, with pretty pink and white Italianate sets and costumes of the period were used, and Romeo and Juliet—though both older than in the English conception—acted with all the proper ardour.

Both *Othello* and *King Lear* were being performed at the time I was in Moscow, and I was told that the vogue for Shakespeare was the result of a high admiration for his works expressed by Stalin.

There was political significance in the visit to the capital of a company of Kazak players, for Kazakstan borders the Mongolian frontier. The company was fêted ; the newspapers were full of praise ; and Stalin himself attended a performance of their opera, *The Lady of Silk*. It was indeed a spectacle of great fascination. In appearance and in their style of acting the Kazaks were strikingly Oriental. They were clothed in embroideries of gorgeous colour, sang high throaty songs to strange music, and performed thrilling dances with swords and bows.

There was no doubt of their contentment with their lot as members of the Soviet national minorities. Kalinin was in a box on the night I was present and at the end of the performance the whole company stepped forward and applauded him enthusiastically, supported by an equally enthusiastic audience.

*Eugen Onegin*, at the Bolshoi Theatre, was more interesting from the point of view of the audience than from the opera, for the singing was mediocre. The opera house was crammed from floor to ceiling, and when the chandeliers were lighted up, during the intervals, it was a remarkable sight to see every tier crowded with proletarian faces. Among the audience,

in the stalls, I observed a Cossack in full uniform and a pair of old peasants looking about them, bewildered but happy. Over each box was the device of the hammer and sickle and above the proscenium a revolutionary emblem of red flags, and on a scroll the opening bars of the *Internationale*.

The conductor wore a white tie and a tail-coat and there were many attempts at evening dress among the audience. My neighbour had scarlet nails and a permanent wave, and did not hesitate to put her arms unashamedly round her companion's neck during love duets. In the former Imperial box sat six or eight nondescript workers, busy with ices at the intervals.

On the stage a Petrograd ball-room, blazing with Imperial decorations, was presented with extravagant splendour, to the obvious delight of the spectators.

(iv)

Though the Kremlin was closed to us, and with it the priceless relics of Russian history, permission was granted us to inspect the Crown Jewels, which are now preserved in the State Bank.

Passing by saluting sentries, and escorted by three amiable thugs in open cricket shirts, we entered a high room full of light, where, opposite us, sparkling and gleaming in a manner unrivalled by any jeweller's shop in the world, were spread the jewels of the Romanovs'.

In the centre, irresistibly drawing the eye, was the Crown of Russia, made for Catherine the Great in the Byzantine form, and in shape resembling a mitre. It consisted entirely of diamonds, except for one enormous

uncut ruby on the top, bearing a cross of five magnificent diamonds. By its side was a miniature crown, also in diamonds, made, later, for the use of the Tsarina. Both, we were informed, had been worn at the last Coronation ceremony of 1894. The orb and the Imperial sceptre, containing the famous diamond presented to Catherine by Count Orlov, lay close at hand. The whole regalia was designed on lines of great beauty, and carried no suggestion, as is usual with such emblems, of Wardour Street.

A separate case contained a part of the jewellery of the last Tsarina, There was a magnificent tiara, in the high Russian style, of blue diamonds which appeared to be dripping with light, and by it lay a long necklace of superb pearls. But the pearls, because they had been for so long unworn, had lost their lustre and were dead.

Then there was the chain of St. Andrew, composed of diamonds and adorned with medallions of gold and enamel, which was worn by the Tsar on ceremonial occasions ; the famous uncut "Shah" diamond, presented to the Tsar by a Persian prince ; diamond sash-ornaments and epaulettes ; immense sapphires and emeralds from the Urals ; aigrettes in diamonds, sapphires and rubies, and a beautiful spray of flowers made in the eighteenth century, of pink and yellow diamonds, and emeralds.

Jewels of such a calibre as these are too dazzling, in their effect—fortunately perhaps—to evoke strong emotions. Otherwise, aided by the imagination of the beholder, they might have appeared to contain a deep and tragic significance. As it was, E. lighted upon a child's toy, a rattle and whistle encrusted with rubies, which, when blown on for our benefit by one of the

amiable thugs, drew from her eye a counter-Revolutionary tear.

Before we left other cupboards were opened, containing bars of gold and platinum, recently mined in the Lena fields, and it was impressed on us that this valuable display was symbolic of the great gold resources available in Russia to-day.

It was at Kolomenskoye, ten miles south of the capital, that the Tsars resided before they moved to the Kremlin. Crammed into a dilapidated 'bus, which swerved and plunged over a series of small canyons called a road, we arrived there battered but whole, and walked up through a dusty but picturesque village of ramshackle wooden houses to the site of the former palace, which was approached charmingly by an avenue of linden trees, in thick green leaf.

The palace itself—the favourite summer resort of Ivan the Terrible—has quite disappeared, but the Church of the Ascension, built in 1532, remains, and with it four or five other buildings grouped in a square on a high bluff above the Moscow River.

Berlioz, on a visit to Kolomenskoye, pronounced the style of the church as "Gothic," but it has been pointed out by those with a more specialised knowledge of architecture, that it inherited, in fact, many parts of its form from the wooden churches of North Russia, although the building is of brick.

The church has an imposing conical tower, from which warning signals were made to the Kremlin when the Tartars were on their way, and at its base are a number of covered galleries and staircases, these latter recalling an Italian style and prompting some, indeed, to name an Italian as the architect of the whole. The interior has been converted into a

museum, and all the ecclesiastical appurtenances are still intact—*ikonostas*, icons, lamps, altar cloths. Only the absent odour of incense and the many labels proclaim the land without God.

On the terrace overlooking the river stands a throne carved of stone, and bearing the double eagle, which was used by Ivan IV to watch hawking on the plains opposite, and perhaps bear-fights and hawking on the frozen river. To-day, the first lock of the Moscow-Volga Canal may be observed from Ivan's terrace ; and, farther off, beyond the green domes of a convent, the squat new factories and the white blocks of dwellings for those who work in them.

There were stray figures lounging in the sun on the slopes below the church and, as I watched, a broad grey river-boat—the *Bolshevik*—slowly approached. Someone, on board, was playing a concertina.

Certain of the ancient buildings near the church have been fitted up with sixteenth-century furniture of beautifully painted or carved designs ; and farther off, along a path, on which some women in white kerchiefs were peacefully hoeing, is the little wooden house of Peter the Great, transported from Archangel and now re-erected among the trees.

It, too, has been completely furnished and arranged with admirable taste in its contemporary style and includes many of Peter's own possessions : his bed, his maps, and some of his books.

An escape, however brief, into the past, such as Kolomenskoye afforded from Moscow's feverish concentration on the present, has a soothing effect which can scarcely be imagined by those who have not experienced the racket of investigating the Great Experiment.

It offered, too, a most salutary reminder of the ancient Russia which is too easily forgotten in the present times, when it is frequently assumed that the significant history of Russia began in 1917. If, indeed, certain of those investigators of the Truth would consent to look beyond that date, they would find much of great significance to illuminate the path of their search.

It is therefore with considerable pleasure that I recall a day spent at Novo-Jerusalinskaya, the ancient monastery founded by the patriarch Niko and lying some forty miles west of Moscow. We passed, on the way to the monastery, Moscow's military flying-ground, where there appeared to be much activity ; and, later, one of the large labour settlements—mostly containing political prisoners—whose inmates were seen to be working under armed guards, on another portion of the Volga Canal.

Soon we came to woods of fresh birch trees and the darker fir, a land of small streams and green meadowy valleys, little wooden *datchas* and sprays of wild white blossom. Long before we reached the monastery I could see its golden domes shining above the fir trees.

The day was one of brilliantly clear sunshine and the monastery when first perceived could not have appeared more beautiful. Dazzling white, crowded with domes, and crowned with a great pagoda-like tower, encircled by tier upon tier of small shuttered windows, the Church of the Ascension rises 220 feet to the sky, and stands upon a tree-covered eminence.

A high wall surrounds the church and contains the best of the monastery buildings, the residence of the patriarch, and a tall white bell-tower. All is now deserted.



As suggested by the name of the monastery—the New Jerusalem—its church was originally built on the model of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, but in 1759, during the reign of the Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, it was considerably enlarged, and redecorated by Rastrelli, who created in it a Russian version of Italian baroque. A fringe of cherubs' heads, for example, circumnavigates the exterior of the cathedral, and strikes a strangely familiar note of the south.

Within, the white walls are picked out with royal blue and gold, and the monogram of the Empress, headed by the double eagle, crowns each doorway (the double eagle, incidentally, still glittered on the tower, though its days must certainly be numbered).

At the west end stands a model of the Holy Tomb, covered, in the eighteenth century, with an elaborate gold decoration, but revealing in places the original casing of green and white enamel, adorned with saintly frescoes.

High above the sanctuary was a collection of small chapels, many of them lined with ceramic tiles of the seventeenth century, with eighteenth century plaster scrolls flung across them. In the sanctuary itself, facing the altar, was a gallery—in six tiers—for the choir. When all the places were occupied the church must have been filled with a great volume of sound.

The huge church was well kept and curiously complete. In some of the side chapels I found that the altars and altar-cloths still remained.

Below the monastery, on its wooded ridge, were surroundings of a tranquil and park-like beauty. Through a valley of high grass flowed a broad and shallow river, and at the head of the valley a plantation of birches

threw long shadows in the afternoon sun. A small white chapel stood beside the river at the spot where pilgrims were formerly wont to cross the water on their way to the monastery.

We sat for some time enjoying this scene of peace, which seemed so far removed from Russia as we had come to know it.

It was only on our way back to Moscow, as we drove through a village and observed a shabby queue waiting its turn to buy kerosene, that we were reminded of the reality.

The time at length came for me to leave Moscow and move northwards on my journey through Russia. On the last day I received a characteristic *envoi*.

I had begged permission to visit the Novospasski Monastery, the oldest monastery in Moscow, but was informed on that last day that admittance could not be granted. As an alternative, however, it was proposed that special leave should be granted us to visit the prophylactorium—an institution in which former prostitutes undergo reformation by courses in knitting and weaving. The prophylactorium—together, of course, with its inmates—is included in the regular sight-seeing excursions offered to tourists by the State ; but as consolation for the loss of the monastery, E. and I were to be accorded a private reception by the once fallen. We accepted the invitation and were advised that the comrades would be ready to receive us at 4 p.m. A bourgeois mind could scarcely be blamed, surely, for reading into that message something in the nature of an invitation to a tea-party.

We arranged our day accordingly and were just

preparing to start out for our afternoon visit when a telephone message reached us. It said that the comrades regretted they could not receive us after all that day as they were "too busy."

Remembering the late profession of our hostesses the bourgeois mind might well consider that the wording of the comrades' excuse was ill-chosen.

Inadequately fortified by two thimblefuls of brandy, which was all we could reasonably afford owing to the inhospitable Soviet currency regulations inflicted on the foreigner, E. and I prepared to embark on our separate journeys. There had been rain and the streets of Moscow on that last evening looked dark and wet. Particularly dismal.

We agreed, as we paced the rickety wooden platform of the October Station, until it was time for my train to start, that under some conditions the eye of faith had to be remarkably long-sighted. Then it was time to say good-bye.

## LENINGRAD

(i)

IT SEEMED AS THOUGH THE TIDE OF REVOLUTION sweeping high through the city of Leningrad, and passing on to Moscow, had carried all life with it. The great squares and wide streets bore only a scattering of people ; voices echoed from one house to another ; down from the far end of a *prospekt* advanced a single tram, passed by and went on its way ; grass grew rankly in public squares and gardens ; no faces were to be seen at the windows ; no one went in or out. It was a strange sight to see so fair, so magnificent, a city so utterly scorned.

For Petrograd, St. Petersburg, Leningrad, as you will, can have few rivals in the world in the beauty of its buildings.

Crescents, squares, theatres and triumphal arches of superb neo-classical design, baroque palaces, imposing bridges, fill the eye. The colours are washes of tawny gold, pale green, orange-red, and the decorations and adornments baroque statues and rococo scrolls, heroic figures and trophies of bronze. The wide Neva flows between ordered dignity, and above all glitters the golden spire of the Admiralty.

But Leningrad is the saddest city in Russia. It is the city of Peter, of Catherine, of Rossi, Gogol, Diaghileff, and although it was the scene of the most

dramatic incidents of the people's revolution it affords no background to the people's government and they have abandoned it to decay. Plaster crumbles, paint peels, pavements are crumbled and cracked.

Rastrelli's Winter Palace, an elegant baroque residence built for Catherine II, is the most degraded sight. Its pillars are stained and cracked, its windows have neither glass nor frames and before the length of the palace has been erected a wooden rostrum, painted grey and bearing salutations to Stalin, which is used as the grandstand at military parades. Loud-speakers have been clamped to each corner of the palace and its façade bears as well iron sockets in which flags may be deposited.

The great Admiralty building shows its neglect less clearly than the eighteenth century palace, and flanked on one side by the Neva and on the other by a park, in which were ranged at the time of my visit a row of kiosks recalling the colour of Benois, remains a masterpiece of Russian Empire style.

St. Isaac's Cathedral, an imposing creation on classical lines of the early nineteenth century, serves as an anti-religious museum, its great dome rendering inconsequent such diagrams and scientific paraphernalia as are displayed beneath it.

Arriving at Leningrad from Moscow and the south, the traveller feels he has returned to Europe, or at least that he has reached the nearest to the European effect that a Russian mind can create. It is indeed a part of Leningrad's beauty that it is the Russian version of an European capital and that although foreign architects created its grandest buildings the Russian spirit prevails. In palaces and Government buildings a great size was employed just as in the



LENINGRAD

- (i) *An entrance to the Admiralty.*
- (ii) *Triumphal Arch designed by Rossi.*



equivalent construction of the day (the projected Palace of the Soviets in Moscow will be the tallest building in the world), and the thoroughfares are straight and broad.

Partly owing to the conviction that Leningrad, which lies close in flying distance to the frontier, will be the first city to be bombarded in the event of attack, and partly owing to the fact that all Government activity is now concentrated in Moscow, there is far less evidence of growth and industrial activity to be seen in or near Leningrad than at Moscow. True, a boot-factory and a model bakery were included in sight-seeing tours, and I am sure that an admirable crèche (together no doubt with prophylactorium) was on view, but beyond a glimpse of some sternly functional workers' blocks, I devoted my attention in the short time that remained to me, to institutions peculiar to Leningrad, and, since they included the Hermitage, the School of Ballet, Tsarskoe Selo, and the Palace of Pavlovsk, I found that my attention was not unprofitably directed.

First, however, I was required to observe a villa of hideous aspect, which I was informed had been the residence of a ballerina—formerly mistress to the Tsar. A lorry load of Red soldiers were also, I noticed, having this symbol of Imperial iniquity pointed out to them. Upon the balcony of the villa Lenin had addressed a crowd—redeeming feature—in the early days of the Revolution; later, another balcony was pointed out, from which, according again to local tradition, “Sir Buchanan” had also addressed a crowd.

The Smolni Convent, which was the scene of a most dramatic incident in the Revolution and from



which Lenin directed operations in 1917, was also only to be seen from the outside, and I should have welcomed an opportunity of visiting the neighbouring Cathedral of the Resurrection, the work of Rastrelli. As, however, the Cathedral domes, with the rest of the fabric, appeared to be nearing collapse, it is doubtful whether it will be visible to anybody from the outside for very much longer.

There was also the Fortress of Peter and Paul, which is customarily described as "dread." It now houses the Mint of the Soviet Union.

The Cathedral, inside the prison walls, with its tapering golden spire, was built in the eighteenth century, and though it served the Russian church it is in the Italian baroque style with the sanctuary doors of a carved and open design. All the Romanov rulers of Russia, with the exception of Peter II who is buried in Moscow, lie here in marble sarcophagi. Once the church was hung with silver wreaths, but now, since these were sold, it has a sad appearance.

The prison itself was appropriately grim. It was used both by the Tsarists and the Bolsheviks, in particular for the torture of solitary confinement, but has been unoccupied since 1922. In some of the cells sat distraught waxen figures rivalling Madame Tussaud's in their horrible verisimilitude.

When these observances had been performed, I lost no time in making my way across the vast Square, formerly called after Alexander I, to the imposing entrance of the Hermitage flanked by ten gigantic Atlantes of grey granite, and up the grand staircase between canyon walls of yellow marble to the main picture gallery.

Under the roof of no other gallery in the world

can there be gathered so numerous a collection of pictures. It was not until after paying several visits to the gallery and striding for mile after mile past walls bearing up works of highly inferior art, that I learned to make my way to the far-flung sites of the many remarkable pictures which are the eventual reward of the strong-footed. The colossal malachite and jasper vases, which adorn the galleries, served as useful direction-posts.

The task of the visitor is not made easier by the lack of a systematised labelling system, and, except for the French pictures, which have been lately rearranged, the position and hanging of the pictures themselves leave much to be desired.

Of the Italians, it is the later artists who are more widely represented—as is to be expected from the taste of a collection largely formed in the eighteenth century. Veronese, particularly in his *Descent from the Cross*, a picture originally in San Giovanni, Venice, and once the property of Charles I, is magnificently represented, and so too are Titian—with both his *Magdalene* and *Danae*—and Tiepolo. There are a number of interesting works by the two Bassanos and an allegorical subject showing Mars and Apollo in conflict, by Bronzino. Ample opportunity, too, is provided for fashionable admiration of Magnasco, the picturesque.

Of the earlier period, the small and charming *Constabile* Madonna of Raphael is of first importance and so too is the Leonardo *Madonna Litta*, though the latter is not held by expert opinion to be wholly the work of the artist. But a work which I found of an especially satisfying beauty was Fra Angelico's fresco of the Virgin and Child, with Sts. Dominic and

Thomas Aquinas. The Virgin wears a grey lavender-coloured robe, and the Saints on her either hand are dressed in the black robes of their Order. They hold open the gospels, while the Child has His fingers raised in blessing.

Further on, in the long north gallery overlooking the Neva, I came on the exquisite little Stroganoff *Virgin Annunciate* of Simone Martini. The Angel of the Annunciation must have filled a separate panel and is missing, but the picture is complete in itself. The Virgin, in a flowing dark robe, turns her head to receive the tidings. Her left hand holds open the pages of a red book.

But the Botticelli *Adoration* was nowhere to be seen, nor the Raphael *St. George* (painted for Henry VII as a gift from Duke Guidobaldino of Urbino), nor the Baldovinetti *Virgin* or Castagno's Triptych—and when I asked the custodian of their fate, she could only shake her head and say, “No more ! No more !”

She pointed out to me a mile or two of works by Cima, Lo Spagna, Giralamo da Santa Croce, Sodoma, Botticini, and others of their ilk, but they were a poor recompense.

Still, some might say that a gallery which boasts no fewer than forty Rembrandts can afford to dispose of other treasures, if disposal is the reason for the disappearance of the Italians. Past a league or so of Metsus, Terborch, de Hooch and lesser representatives of kindred schools, I came to the Rembrandts—old men, old women and old mothers. The display is very remarkable, though I confess I preferred the high and decorative *Flora* and the smaller but equally beautiful *David reconciled to Absalom* above such a work on the grand scale as *The Return of the Prodigal Son*,

with its dark cumbersome figures, or even to the renowned *Danae*, though here the light and shade effect is certainly the height of competence.

In an adjoining room hung two resplendent portraits by Van Dyck of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, from the Walpole collection at Houghton, and I came on a little gallery of English work containing among others a pleasant Gainsborough of the Duchess of Beaufort and two charming Morlands.

But the most brilliant section of the whole gallery is the magnificent series of apartments in the Winter Palace, into which are now gathered the works of the French School. Under a policy which is described as "the Socialisation of the Hermitage" the rooms have been arranged with superb French furniture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the visitor passes through them in chronological order. There is much to commend this scientific system.

The visitor comes first to five works by the brothers le Nain and next to a collection of nineteen Poussins which can only be excelled by that in the Louvre. Both *The Holy Family* and the *Descent from the Cross* are wholly admirable pictures, but in *Moses Striking water from the Rock* Poussin, both in his grouping and in the rich colouring of dark blues and orange-brown, is revealed in his top form. The picture is extremely dramatic and each figure in the group round the rock plays a part. There is not one who does not add something to the tenseness of the scene and helps to focus the attention on the figure of Moses, who stands with his back to the beholder. Even the long rifts in the threatening clouds are calculated to assist in heightening the tension.

*Israelites in combat with the Amalekites* is another

excellent picture, but unfortunately, like many others in the gallery, it is in a very unsatisfactory state of repair, and is without glass protection.

Upon the walls of the succeeding room, which have been unbecomingly whitewashed, hang a Claude quartet, the *Four Periods of the Day*, their obvious excellence only marred by the darkened condition into which they have fallen in the course of years, and by their present neglect. (I was shocked to find I could blow a cloud of dust off *Morning*.)

A Biblical story appears in the first picture, which represents, as may be expected, a classical Italian landscape. *Noon*, for example, shows the Holy Family resting on their flight, and being tended by an angel. In one corner two camels pass by a small ruined temple. *Evening* tells of Tobias and the angel ; and *Night* shows a shepherd being led away from his flock by an angel, a scene I could not identify.

All four pictures abound in an atmosphere of classical serenity.

The eighteenth century pictures, set off with commodes, china cabinets and settees of their period, form a world of enchanting elegance. Lancret and Watteau are generously and characteristically represented, and Boucher is seen as a landscape painter in two grey-green scenes of mill and stream, while Chardin in *The Artist's Table* contributes a most interesting still life.

On an upper floor I came on half-a-dozen rooms containing French pictures of the nineteenth century. One was devoted entirely to Picasso, and in an obscure passage hung three Rousseaus. There was Matisse, with a large *Conversation* ; Derain, Vuillard, and landscapes and a *Smoker* by Cezanne. Van Gogh

and Gauguin were not absent, and there were three lovely portraits by Renoir of the early period, with, close by, a delicious Monet of a lady with a pink parasol, standing in a sunlit garden.

In no part of the gallery was there anything more than a very scattered attendance, but I found an expectant group, mainly consisting of youthful members of the Red Army, round the fantastic toy presented by Potemkin to Catherine. The work of an English jeweller, it takes the form of a golden peacock, life-size, which sits perched in an oak tree, and at the hour spreads its wings and cries out, while a neighbouring owl rolls its eyes. The oak tree is surrounded by a mushroom growth which contains the works. An extravagant gift.

It need hardly be said that the Gallery boasts an excellent Spanish school, though the visitor should be warned against taking seriously the two works ascribed to El Greco, and at the time of my visit I found an entire wing devoted to an Iranian exhibition demanding a complete study to itself.

But besides its pictures, the Hermitage contains a priceless collection of antique sculpture, gems and ornaments, drawings and engravings. It holds, too, an unrivalled collection of Scythian gold ornaments dating from the fourth and fifth century B.C., mainly discovered in the North Caucasus.

The collection is not usually open to view, and I was not only given the privilege of the entrée, but also the escort of Stepanova, the most informative curator of the collection.

All the exhibits were fascinating in the beauty of the work and in their detail, but I remember most clearly a fifth century comb, surmounted by a group of

warriors, complete in every detail ; a fourth century bow and arrow case, beautifully chased, and a pair of gold discs to be worn by women of the temple, embossed with a magnificent head of Athene, crowned with flowers. Greek influence was very clear.

There were pagan wreaths of laurel and oak leaves (all of course fashioned of gold) and, perhaps most striking of all, the gold mask of an unknown man,

A pair of ear-rings with long elaborate pendants bore a tiny design of horses and charioteers, and I was informed that when the finest craftsman in Leningrad had tried to make a replica, the gold had melted together and he had declared that the secret had perished with the makers.

In an adjoining strong-room were jewellery and, *objets d'art* of the eighteenth and nineteenth century from the Imperial collections, an almost fabulous display of wealth.

There were cases of snuff-boxes (including Peter the Great's in the shape of a boat), chalices set with diamonds and a screen of jewelled watches. Most extravagant of all, perhaps, was a saddle and horse-trappings scattered with pearls and diamonds, which was a gift from the Sultan of Turkey to the Tsar. Rings, of course, there were by the score, and a complete toilet set in pure gold made in 1739 for the Empress Anna. Dazzled by such magnificence, I could do no more than glance at the nineteenth century work, thank my escort profusely, and retire to a world where considerably less was demanded of the eye.

The School of Ballet is established in the same building and the same street—the Theatre Street of Karsavina with its yellow Rossi buildings—as in pre-War days when it was attended by such as Pavlova

and Njinsky. There was no break in the activities of the School during the Revolution (in Moscow the organisation was several times interrupted). In Leningrad, classes were maintained and Vaganova, who has been teaching here for forty years and can remember Petipa, is still attached to the School.

But the unbroken maintenance of the School does not mean that the Tsarist tradition has been permitted to live on, at any rate to the outward eye. The School was formerly subsidised by the Court: it is now subsidised by the State. Texts for the times, pinned to scarlet banners, decorate passages and rehearsal rooms; a bust of Stalin looms behind the chair of the School's director, and there are many Young Comsomolgs among the pupils.

For all that, however, it is at the School and at the Mariinsky Theatre that one gets a most direct intimation of the past. How could it be otherwise? The history of the ballet in Russia is linked with that of the Court; the Tsar was its chief patron; his Chamberlains dictated the fortunes of the dancers and those, such as Diaghileff, who influenced their art. Before the Revolution the School had been conducted on lines of almost monastic discipline; the young pupils were driven to and from their classes in closed carriages, and all communication with the outside world was sternly discouraged.

I was anxious to see how much of the old discipline persisted, and it seemed to me as I walked through the corridors and into the practice rooms that the Director of the School, who accompanied me, was greeted by the young and by their elders with a greater degree of conscious respect than was the custom in other institutions in modern Russia.



Training begins at the age of eight or nine and there are 462 pupils in the School. As well as instruction in dancing the pupils receive—just as in former days—a general education. (I looked in for a moment or two on the spectacle of twenty *ballerine* aged eleven or twelve engaged in a history lesson.) For the first four years the style taught is strictly classical with the addition of certain fifteenth-century dances. The Director emphasised the importance of the classical dance and pointed to a portrait of Diderot which hung beside his desk. I asked now many *fouettes* were achieved nowadays and was told that sixteen was usual, thirty-two often achieved and forty-eight the record of the best dancers.

I spoke of Diaghileff but found that his name did not evoke a very warm response from official quarters. Individual dancers, however, received a proud recognition and I was shown photographs of former pupils of the School, observing in one the childlike features of Lopokova, who was shown at the age of sixteen and the enchantment of those features has changed little with the years, dressed in a full grey Puritanical costume. In the names of another group of young male dancers appeared that of Njinsky.

Little or no interest was displayed when I mentioned de Basil's Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo. I was merely informed that a *première danseuse* from Moscow had visited Paris and returned with the pronouncement that there were no dancers in Europe as good as those in the U.S.S.R.

As to the ballets which were performed by the school, the following were in the regular repertoire : *Lac des Cygnes*, *Giselle*, *Esmeralda*, *Don Quixote* and *Carnaval*. The modern creations were : *Flames over*

*Paris, Gardens of Illusion* and *The Fountain of Bakhtshi Serai*. *Petroushka* has been performed during one or two seasons but there was, it seemed, adverse criticism as to the use of Fokine's choreography and it had not been given recently. (It is interesting to remember that although *Petroushka* was regularly performed by Diaghileff's company it was not produced in Russia until 1920.) *L'Oiseau de Feu* was never given nowadays.

It was fascinating to visit the practice rooms—the same rooms which had seen the first steps of those who were later to achieve the most glamorous fame of all. In one room a young man was dancing about alone. It was Sergeev, the leading male dancer of the day. Presently he was joined by a young woman, and, advancing and retiring before a long mirror which fully covered one wall, they went through their steps to the accompaniment of a pathetically tuneless piano.

Later I saw them again in a larger practice-room and this time Sergeev was dancing with Jordan, the first ballerina of Leningrad, and supported by Didinskaya, Chebukiani, Kaplan, Chedi and other stars of the school, with Andrew Lopokov, brother to Lopokova, who teaches character-dancing, and sometimes takes a part himself in the performances, in attendance.

All were in their practice dresses. Sergeev wore an aertex vest, black breeches and white stockings, and the girls had on either much-worn *tutus* with black bodices, or chiffon draperies, with their hair tied in ribbons.

The room was high and sunny and those who were resting or waiting their turn sat apart on the window-sill with their stockinged legs spread apart, resembling inevitably a group by Degas.

The figures, carrying themselves nobly, advanced and retired ; a sheet of paper was hurriedly contrived into a fan ; Jordan snapped her castanets (they were rehearsing *Don Quixote*) ; again and again the pianist thumped out the accompaniment until the steps were perfected ; there was a faint odour of sweat ; a girl walked past unconcerned with a plate of pies ; now and again Sergeev sprinkled the floor with a watering-can.

They were still advancing and retiring on that sloping floor before the mirror when I reluctantly took myself away, with the sound of the energetic piano in my ears.

The style and quality of the dancing I was scarcely able to judge at close quarters in the practice-rooms, but through the kindness of the Director of the School I was privileged to attend a full ballet rehearsal at the Mariinsky Theatre.

The rehearsal, which was complete with orchestra and scenery, was of a performance given once a year by the students of the School, supported by many of the stars. They did one act from *Fadette* and *Esmeralda*, and a new ballet—*Andalusian Wedding*. Neither of the first two ballets were of any particular distinction and had been clearly chosen in order to give scope to as many dancers as possible. The third was to the music of Granados, Albeniz, and de Falla, and the choreography was the work of a leading ballerina of the School—a girl of typical dark Russian beauty who sat beside me and explained the proceedings.

Although the music was undistinguished and the scenery old-fashioned, it was clear that the Russian talent for the dance still continues. Here was the natural beauty of movement, the vigour, the aston-

ishing leaps (of Kaplan for example) which is Russian and Russian alone. I noticed that the children—and there were many of them on the stage—had a natural instinct for grouping themselves and for acting, and I observed too that when they were not dancing they crowded the boxes and balcony to look on intently. One felt that with all of them dancing was a business, a work to be unaffectedly performed, something entirely natural to their inclinations. And here perhaps is at once the secret of the brilliance of the Russian dancer, and the reason for the disappointment—it must be admitted—which the balletomane from Western Europe must suffer in attending ballet in Russia to-day.

Russians have an instinct for the dance which is excelled by no other race in the world, but they require something more before they can turn their dancing into the high artistic expression to be found in the ballet. They require to be touched by the West. It was Diaghileff with his French artists and composers who supplied them with a cosmopolitan atmosphere and made the artistic effect complete. The dancers must become self-conscious, and not until then will the emotional and spiritual side emerge which is the soul of Russian Ballet. Without the civilising touch of the West, Russian dancing remains athletics—brilliant and inimitably graceful athletics—but athletics, just the same, which, though they delight the eye and the senses, leave the spirit untouched.

There were some in the School who had worked with Diaghileff and, as I sat in the stalls of the darkened theatre, they spoke of him and his brilliant company.

“How wonderful,” one said, “were those seasons in London ! Such hospitality, such enthusiasm !”

“ How charming were our rooms in Montagu Street and Southampton Row ! ” said another.

They asked for news of Grigorieff (Diaghileff's stage manager who is with Colonel de Basil to-day) and Spessiva, and Nemchinova, and Massine, and one or two spoke of Njinsky. None made any comment on the present or criticism on the ballets and I did not invite them. But I detected among some of those who could remember the past a certain weariness, borne with Russian resignation.

The only comment I noticed was a shrug of the shoulders when I mentioned that I was going to see a performance of the ballet *Don Quixote*. *Don Quixote*, to music by Mincus and choreography unspecified, was clearly straight out of the pre-War repertoire. It would have made Diaghileff turn in his grave. Spectacle and realism were duly employed according to the fashion of the day. *Don Quixote* made his entrances on a real white horse ; Sancho Panza on a real grey donkey ; while a full-size windmill (with revolving sails) was provided for the tilting knight. The scenery (when the lighting permitted a glimpse of it) might have been painted by Frank Brangwyn. It must be said that the ballet was vigorously danced and vociferously applauded.

Walking back from the Mariinsky I found myself on the Moika with the black waters of the canal beside me. Opposite loomed the imposing Empire façade of the Yusopoff Palace, the scene of Rasputin's doing-to-death. The family coat-of-arms still surmounted the entrance, but a plate beside the door informed the passer-by that the palace was now a club-room for educational workers.

Looking in at the uncurtained windows of other

palaces, rich with baroque embellishments, I could see men in cloth caps playing billiards under the bare electric light, and in the ground-floor rooms were their dormitories crowded with iron beds.

Such, just and right though it may be, I reflected, is the face of revolution. But at the moment the features seemed hard and ugly.

In Rossi's lovely theatre, formerly the Alexandra Theatre, now renamed The State, I attended a performance of *Peter the First*, a chronicle play adapted by Alexis Tolstoi from his biography of the Tsar. The theatre was a delight in itself. Built in 1832, its façade consists of a loggia of six Corinthian columns surmounted by a quadriga in bronze. It is painted in a pale yellow wash picked out in white.

The interior is of red and gold Empire decoration with four balconies and, in place of a pit, a raised amphitheatre, which rises behind the stalls to the first circle of boxes. There is a foyer in the same restrained red and gold decoration, lit by a magnificent chandelier.

The play itself illustrated the whole of Peter's life. It showed him first at the anvil, helping with the building of Petrograd ; on the battlefield of Poltava in conflict with the Swedes, and on the banks of the Neva when the city was at last completed. There was a scene in the throne-room of the Kremlin and another when he was seen committing Alexis, his son, to prison. Though the propagandist element was not obtruded, the play was a lesson for the times, both in Peter's democracy and patriotism and in his efforts to bring culture to his people (he was seen cutting off

a boyar's beard as a symbol of his introduction of European customs and civilisation).

Though it was produced on spectacular and rather unimaginative lines, the play was entertaining enough and the audience evidently found it much to their liking—particularly the boisterous by-play, with which in the Russian manner they were well supplied.

Opera in Leningrad, judging by the few examples I saw, was on a higher level than in Moscow, and confirmed an opinion that it is on the whole the best form of theatrical performance to be seen in Russia. Operatic performances benefited by the Russian genius for presentation, and the inherent talent for music was, of course, amply demonstrated.

Tschaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*, for instance, was given a first-class performance, handsomely staged, and only marred by a "classical" ballet of infantile evolutions.

I was surprised to find Mozart's *Figaro* in the bill, but recollected that Beaumarchais' play had been a sensation at the time of the French Revolution and was indeed regarded as a highly provocative performance. It was, therefore, more surprising to find that the opera (sung in Russian) was played "straight" with no revolutionary emphasis, in a charming eighteenth-century rococo setting.

But by far the most exciting performance of opera—perhaps indeed the best theatrical production I saw in Russia—was *Quiet Don*, from Sholokov's novel, *Quiet flows the Don*. The composer is a young man named Djerjinsky of whom much is, very naturally, expected. His music is not as advanced as that of Shostakovitch (perhaps it is for that reason that he has not yet come under the "formalist" ban) but it is

full of imagination and highly effective. The story of the opera is laid in Russia just before, and during, the War, a tragic story of a peasant girl from a village in the Don valley who is betrayed by her lover and finally dies. The music takes full advantage of, and indeed embodies, the tragic theme.

The settings of the many scenes are brilliantly devised in the modern Russian style. There is, in particular, a highly dramatic episode at a flour fair when, with all the peasants collected beneath him, the Governor of the province reads from the balcony of the flour-mill the Russian declaration of war with Germany, upon which all the peasants throw their caps in the air ; and more moving was the scene on a high road, marked by crooked telegraph poles, when, with the War well advanced, the Red and White Armies meet and fraternise. For a moment or two, one was fully able to realise the great triumph of the Revolution, so full of vitality and confidence was the music and the singing. I confess I found the performance profoundly moving and joined as heartily as I might in the ovation which the opera received.

(ii)

We drove out of Leningrad across a treeless plain passing the customary one-storied cabins of wood and an occasional modern factory of stained and crumbling plaster. Presently on a ridge gleamed the golden domes of a church. We drove in at an entrance flanked—incongruously—by pylons in the Egyptian style and drew up before the Great Imperial Palace of Tsarskoye Selo.

“ And what sort of a castle is this, eh ? ” enquired

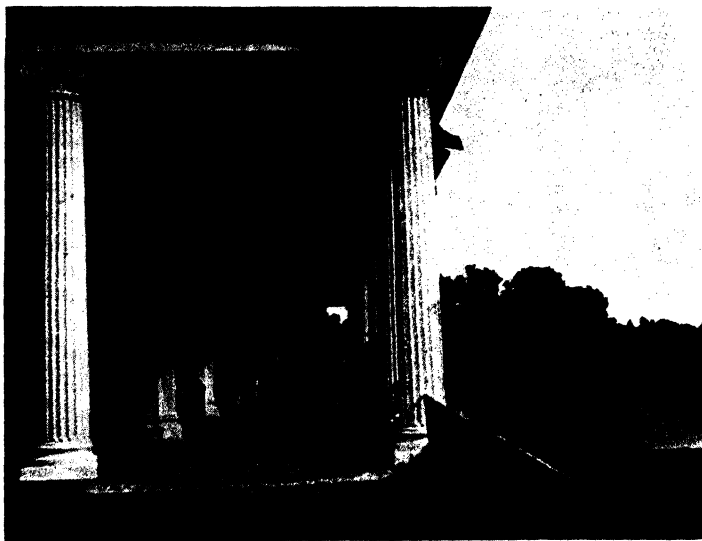


the Americans, recalling no doubt a shadowy succession of battlemented piles and baroque pleasaunces which stretched in their mind across Europe, beginning at Loches, continuing to Heidelberg, and ending now in Red Russia (yes, now at last, the end must be in sight. Europe was coming to an end ; beyond was China and, well, China was not their concern just now).

“ This,” said the guide, “ is the palace of Catherine, formerly known as Tsarskoye Selo, now renamed Detskoye Selo or Children’s village. It is one hundred and seven metres in length and was designed by Rastrelli in 1750. As you will see, the palace is an example of Tsarist extravagance. They were awfully dirty people in those days. There is not a single toilet room in the house ! After we have visited the Catherine Palace, we will visit the former Alexander Palace where Nicholas and his family fled from the revolutionaries of 1917 and lived until they were removed to Siberia and ejected. Please put on these slippers, or over-shoes, before entering the Palace.”

Cowed by the firmness of manner, all bent down and donned slippers (or over-shoes) of a kind usually associated with visits to mosques. Thus equipped, we proceeded in a slipshod way to pass through suite after suite of gilded apartments on the usual lines of a show-palace with the conventional embellishments of tapestry and Chinese wallpapers.

Tsarskoye Selo is, however, exceptionally magnificent. Where else but in Russia could one see a room lined and fitted entirely with amber (the Tsar’s price, remarked the guide, for two hundred Russian soldiers), or another similarly decorated with lapis lazuli ? Splendour was of first consideration. A touch of



TSARSKOYE SELO

(i) *Great Imperial Palace.*

(ii) *The Colonnade designed by Charles Cameron.*



civilised elegance (such, for example, as is to be seen at the Hofburg) would have been welcome.

Still, the whole effect, reaching its climax in the great ballroom with its gilding, mirrors and painted ceiling, was certainly all one could expect of a palace.

Æsthetically, by far the most pleasing were the little apartments of the Tsarina Marie Alexandrovna, in late Empire style, with their white-tiled walls, inset with coloured panels, slim pillars of violet glass, with chandeliers to match, and a parquet floor inlaid with mother-of-pearl. These apartments led on to an open colonnade overlooking the park, designed by Charles Cameron, the Scottish architect, and set with bronze busts. A flight of stone steps led to the park, with the calm surface of an ornamental lake among the trees.

It is not far from the Great Imperial Palace to the Alexander Palace, a charming late eighteenth-century building of white plaster with a colonnade in the centre and a long still lake before it.

We passed through a small ante-room, where there were postcards for sale, straight to the reception-rooms. There were three of them, opening one out of the other, and it was through the french windows of the drawing-room—the centre-room overlooking the park—that the Tsar and his family left the house for the last time on their way to Siberia, driving down the avenue one could see between the trees.

A room to one side of the drawing-room had been used by the Imperial family as a private chapel, and a wooden *ikonostas*, painted grey, stretched across the royal red carpet. A copy of a Raphael Madonna and some icons of crude design hung on the walls.

In the drawing-room itself, I noticed a portrait of

Queen Victoria in a gilt Gothic frame, a gift no doubt to Alexander the Second. Waxen footmen in scarlet uniform were in position beside the door. In the third room, corresponding to that used as the oratory, a slide had been erected for the use of the Royal children.

“ You see,” said the guide, “ they had nothing better to do than to play ! ” A toy motor-car which had once belonged to the Tsarevitch, and, complete to the crowns on the little lamps, was no doubt a model of the Royal cars, stood at the foot of the slide.

Next door was the Tsarina’s drawing-room, furnished and over-furnished in the typical Edwardian manner, with a strong German flavour. Her portrait, painted in 1903 by Karlbach, a Munich painter, in which she appeared, a magnificent figure, in a tiara and evening gown, looked down on the piano, the portfolios of music, the draped shawls, the Biedermeyer chairs and settees.

We passed through these former apartments to the few rooms in which the Imperial family lived their private lives.

First, there was the Tsarina’s boudoir, panelled in grey maple and fitted with the inner balcony, a characteristic of Russian houses. Here again there were the shawls, and the German touches, and a quantity of photographs. In particular I remember a photograph of the Tsarevitch dressed in the uniform of a sailor in the Russian Navy. It was in a blue leather frame which might have come from England, and stood on the Tsarina’s writing-table.

Adjoining was the bedroom of the Tsar and Tsarina. It was kept exactly as they had left it and was complete in every detail, down to their two frilly

pillows and the pink pin-cushions on the dressing-table. So horribly, painfully intimate was it, that even the globe-trotting Americans were hushed into silence.

“A lazy room for lazy minds !” declared the guide, in hard official tones. The furniture was painted white, and the walls papered with a design of garlands of roses tied with pink bows. On each side of the bed were *prie-dieux* screened by curtains and above the bed itself the wall was covered with a mass of icons (the guide said there were eight hundred of them). On a table at the foot of the bed was a row of comic animals (I remember a ridiculous green frog), and close to it a screen stuffed with photographs of relations and friends, scrawled with signatures in the bold manner of Edwardian royalty. There were photographs on the mantelpiece, of the Tsar (signed “Nicky”) out shooting, of their yacht, of their daughters, and a quantity of religious prints. By the side of the bed was a child’s table and chair. A portrait of Queen Victoria in her old age looked down calm and unemotional.

Over it all hung a tragic dead feeling.

The guide meanwhile, busy with her duties, was reading from a screen hung with propagandist material. She gave us extracts from the private letters of the Tsarina to the Tsar ; of the illness of the Tsarevitch, of her faith in Rasputin to cure him, and how she had been to see Rasputin’s grave in the park of the palace and how peaceful it had looked. Somehow one felt that the propaganda value was somewhat discounted by the intimacy both of the letters themselves and the surroundings in which they were being read.

We passed on into the Tsar's bathroom, complete even to his dressing-gown, and came next door to his dressing-room in which hung his many uniforms. Through the glass doors of other cupboards one could see the dresses of sequins and pink voile, which had once been worn by the Tsarina.

On the writing-table of the Tsar's small study was a calendar marking "Monday, July 31st," the day on which he and his family had left for Tomsk. His pipes and even his matchbox were still on the table, and I noticed miniatures of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. In the larger room next door the Tsar had received his ministers. It had a billiard table in it and was fitted with a gallery communicating with the Tsarina's boudoir, and on which, according to the guide, the Tsarina would hide herself and listen to discussions of affairs of State. The room was lined with books in French, German and English, besides Russian, and I saw among others the works of George Eliot and Bernard Shaw. I observed, too, that the horseshoes above the fireplace were all hanging upside down.

That was the end of the visit. I asked for permission to see the nurseries, but was told that they were now used as a crèche and that visitors were not allowed.

Outside, the lake and the park were very still and sunless. The comrades were wandering listlessly in the long rank grass. A few mauve tulips were growing dejectedly in a flower-bed.

"Well, I guess I've never seen a palace arranged that way before—just how they lived in it," said the American woman as we drove away.

"That wasn't a palace," replied her husband,

the business man from Zenith, " that was a home."

And his answer gave the reason for the extraordinary poignancy of Tsarskoye Selo.

Everyone said it was impossible for me to go to Pavlovsk. No tourist ever went there ; I should never find my way ; it was too far ; of course if I liked to hire a car (for the equivalent of £3 or £4) and a guide at five shillings an hour, then something might be arranged. Nevertheless, to Pavlovsk I was determined to go and I was equally determined to do it as cheaply as possible. (Transport to Pavlovsk and back cost me in the end just under three shillings.)

I followed the simple expedient of taking a tram to the railway station lying nearest to the direction of Pavlovsk, buying a return ticket, finding a train (they ran, it appeared, every hour from Leningrad to Pavlovsk), getting into it, sitting in it for fifty minutes and getting out when it reached the correct station. It was a simple journey, there was not even a change, and I was unembarrassed by a guide.

The village of Pavlovsk was presented bodily, in the comprehensive manner of the day, by Catherine the Second to her son Paul and his wife Marie Feodorovna, who in 1782 built a palace there and used it as the royal country residence. Succeeding generations, however, preferred Gatchina or Tsarskoye Selo, and Pavlovsk was relegated to the minor representatives of the Imperial family, being last inhabited by the Grand Duke Constantine Constantinovitch.

None seemed to know the whereabouts of the



Palace but, following a vaguely pointing hand I found myself, after a few minutes' walk, in a park with a little valley crossed by a stream.

Presently, the yellow façade of the palace showed itself close on my left hand, standing on a high rise of land. Rank grass grew thickly on the slope leading up from the stream to the house. Grass grew right up to the walls of the palace and the palace itself appeared as though on a high island of green. Through the windows I could see thick silk curtains and the glint of a chandelier. But none moved, either before the house or inside it. The sun shone very bright and warm on the grass, and very bright on the circle of white pillars bearing up the dome of the house.

I walked up the rise and round to the front of the house, where I experienced a shock of pleasure at first seeing the main façade.

The main portion is in the classical style, painted yellow and white, with two wings running out on either side. These wings contain colonnades with classical busts in niches. At the end of each of the wings, which form a semi-circle, is a lodge, again classical, surmounted by the Imperial coat-of-arms. A statue of Paul the First stands in the centre of the courtyard. Winding over the pillars of the colonnade there has grown a creeper which adds to the atmosphere of enchantment surrounding the forsaken palace and its park.

An elderly man rose from a bench in a corner of the courtyard and offered to take me inside the palace. He referred persistently to "St. Petersburg" and had the graceful courtesy of former days. Charles Cameron, the Scottish architect who worked at

Tsarskoye Selo, made the original design for Pavlovsk, but a fire in 1803 destroyed much of the palace, and Brenna, an Italian, with Rossi, his fellow-countryman, constructed many additions.

The interior, with its furniture and decorations, is a triumph in the Empire style, with, perhaps because its designers were of the south, less of the formality which attaches itself to French decoration of that period and more than a touch of baroque exuberance.

A fine staircase leads to a domed hall and out of it opens a long saloon. At either end of the saloon are two cabinets, the War room and the Peace room, each decorated with appropriate trophies. The War room, for example, bears on its walls gilded helmets, shields, swords and grenades in white plaster ; the Peace room, musical instruments, guitars and mandolines, and garlands of flowers. Both cabinets are hung with chandeliers and fitted with exquisite Empire furniture.

In the State bedroom, with its heavily draped gilded bed, is a blue Sèvres toilet-set, presented to the Tsar by Marie Antoinette and bearing her portrait, and in the Cabinet of Paul the First there are ivory carvings of classical temples, the work of the Empress Marie. Golden stars, busts and urns decorate the room.

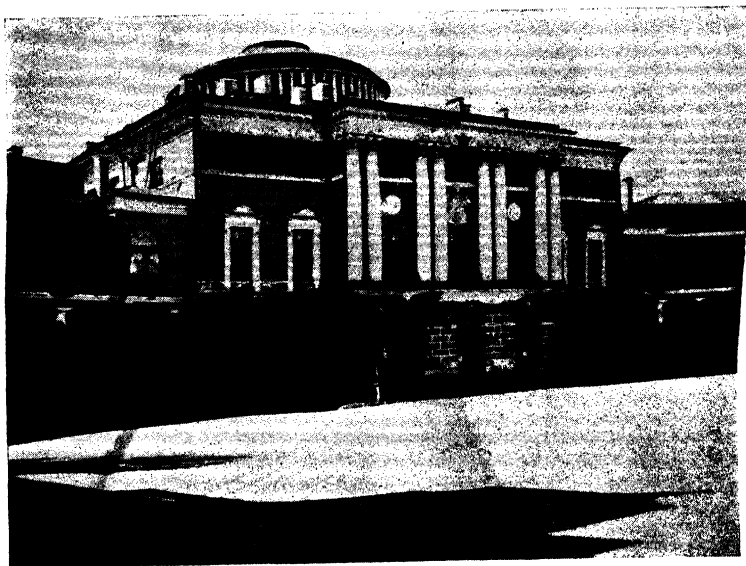
We passed through a charming picture-gallery, hung mainly—since the best pictures have been taken to the Hermitage—with the works of Angelica Kauffman, but containing some magnificent Louis XVI furniture and a set of Gobelin tapestries, to the long throne-room built for Paul the First but never actually used for official receptions. Close by was his

chapel, completely furnished and still smelling faintly of incense.

Attempting to penetrate into the garden of the palace, I was confronted by an old man of ruffianly appearance, who, with a pipe in his mouth and a rifle in his hand, rose from his bed on the grass and forbade me to proceed a step further. Explaining, with the rifle pointing at my stomach, that I was a foreigner and harmless, I begged permission to pass, which was at length granted me, after the ancient sentry, still directing his weapon at me, had shouted to a comrade in the palace for counsel and explained to me that he was on the watch for thieves breaking in through the lower windows, or damaging the statuary.

The garden was charming enough, but had a sadly unkempt appearance. Plaster crumbled from Cameron's elegant little pavilion, and paint had fallen in chunks from Gonzago's *trompe l'œil* on the walls of the colonnade. In the little closed garden where Paul had talked with his ministers the flower-beds were empty and dishevelled and weeds grew thickly at the base of the statues. But there was an enchantment even in the decay.

From the main entrance of the house an avenue of linden trees led to the park, and at the end of the avenue I found a bench and rested there for a little. Close by me an old woman was laboriously planting pansies in a flower-bed shaped like a five-pointed star. It was very soothing to be alone, and without the attendant chatter of the guide. One was able to enjoy the country as country, pure and simple, and not as a few more square yards of the Soviet Union.



PAVLOVSK

- (i) *The main façade.*
- (ii) *A pavilion in the park.*



And how exhilarating it was to let the eye travel over so civilised a landscape ! The park was arranged with dells and valleys and set with little temples and pavilions. On either side of a green valley grew firs and birch trees, not in thick barbaric woods, but pleasant, domesticated groves. The grass was thick with buttercups.

For a long time I wandered in the park, coming sometimes to little lakes on which there were boating-parties, mostly of men and boys, and sometimes to a clearing in the trees adorned with the statues of antiquity. Of all the places I saw in Russia, I shall remember the park and the Palace of Pavlovsk with the greatest affection.

In the early evening I returned to the station and found that it, too, had something of interest to offer. Adjoining it was a large open-air restaurant known as "Vogsal" since it had been modelled on the English "Vauxhall" and to this day "Vogsal" is the Russian word for "station," since it was to the "Vogsal" of Pavlovsk that the first railway-line in Russia was laid. Once it was the resort of rank and fashion ; now, with its rows of empty seats, its faded wooden rostrum, its occasional lamp-post, it is reminiscent of a seaside bandstand out of season. The solitary patron, I sat at one of the rusty tin tables and drank some beer as I waited for my train back to Leningrad.

(iii)

One day, walking by myself through the streets of the city, I noticed a crowd of beggars outside a church and entering I found a great press of people.

Mass was being sung. It was the same at another church further down the street ; the nave was crowded with worshippers. Enquiring, I was told that one church was Roman Catholic, the other Lutheran. (The service of the latter was in German for the large German-speaking colony in Leningrad.) Was it always so full ? I asked. The day was Whit-Sunday, I was told. I should like to know how many members of the Orthodox Russian Church have adopted one or other of these religions.

After Whit-Sunday, the "white nights" began. One would wake at 3 a.m., to brilliant sunshine. (The potatoes had to be covered with sacking to prevent them sprouting by night as well as by day.) The chestnut trees dropped their blossom. The days became hotter and the wind sank. It was coming to the time of high summer when I prepared to leave Russia.

I wanted to carry away with me some souvenir of the country and to that end visited one morning the State Antiquariat. There was a larger variety of choice than in the commission shops of Moscow, but the prices were even more exorbitant. "You see," said the unforthcoming saleswoman, when I commented on the fantastic values set on her wares, "we do not want to sell them. They belong to us." There was little more to be said. Easter eggs and Bishop's copes were the cheapest goods for sale (a cloth of silver cope stitched with seed pearls was offered for £4). On the other hand, for an inkstand made in pre-war Germany, in the device of a Russian officer's cap, the customer was expected to pay £8. I was scarcely surprised to see that I was the only customer and that the flow of commerce appeared by the listless

atmosphere of the shop to be running very dry indeed. I did not myself feel inclined to add to its lethargic current.

At length, one afternoon, I found myself driving past the Winter Palace for the last time. Leningrad could not have looked more beautiful. The sun shone, the Neva sparkled, the Admiralty spire gleamed as if of fine gold. I had grown so accustomed to Russia and to things Russian that it seemed an effort to convince myself that I must very shortly adjust my mind to another world.

At the Finland Station a single coach of the Finnish railway was attached to the Russian train. Typically, my luggage arrived one minute before the train was due to leave for the frontier and was flung precipitately into the corridor. In my carriage was an American who, though he had only been in Russia a fortnight or so, had acquired a cautiousness of speech.

"Yes, Russia was very interesting, very interesting," he said in guarded tones. And he looked into the corridor to see if, even at this eleventh hour, a G.P.U. agent was on the watch for him. I think both of us were conscious of a certain tenseness as we neared the frontier. It only took half an hour to reach Belo-Ostrov, where the four of us who were leaving Russia had to descend from the train.

The customs were surprisingly mild (it happened to be the evening of the Day of Rest, and the officials, no doubt being human beings, were anxious to get home quickly). At any rate, the only objects in my suit-case which excited their curiosity were some Soviet stamps I had purchased in Moscow (these were greedily examined) and some private letters from



England, which were carefully perused, but to small purpose it appeared, since none of the officials could speak English.

At length passports were handed back and we were free to go.

Our single coach, guarded by sentries stood isolated on the track. Presently an engine appeared from the direction of Finland, was turned about, our coach was attached to it, and slowly we moved away from Russia. Looking back, I saw the *douanier* and the buffet proprietor dancing together to a gramophone.

Very slowly we approached a red archway labelled "C.C.C.P." There were sentries at attention and a tangle of barbed wire. We passed beneath the archway and crossed an iron bridge over a dark stream. We were out of Russia.

This account would not be complete if I did not record the overwhelming sense of relief which I experienced as the train crossed the frontier. My relief must not be interpreted entirely as a reaction from a communist society—I shall discuss Russia from that aspect in my final chapter—but rather as a mark of the tension of which I was conscious on almost every day I spent in Russia. Judging by the change of manner in my three train companions, I was not unique in my experience. Conversation was no longer guarded; seriousness fell from them; they became human and lively.

At the Finnish frontier station, which was called Raja-joki, each of us, as one man, made for the buffet. Never had beer and a ham sandwich tasted so good, never had customs' officials appeared such welcoming and kindly beings. The American disappeared, to return saying, "You should really try

the gentlemen's cloak-room ; they've got *real* toilet-paper there ! ” The evening sun appeared to shine with a special benevolence over all.

To the homely scent of a wood-burning engine, in a well-sprung berth and between soft white sheets, I was carried into Finland through the peaceful summer's night.

## SUNDAY MORNING

**I**N HELSINGFORS IT WAS SUNDAY MORNING. THE STREETS were sunny and absolutely still. From the top storey of my hotel I could see a host of small wooded islands lying peacefully in a calm and brilliant sea. An extraordinary sense of well-being came over me. Breakfast seemed a magical meal, and the table-cloth, after those weeks of grey and rough-dried linen, appeared a dazzling white. I found myself pressing buttons, and turning on switches and taps for the sheer joy of being once more in a land where such things functioned. To see an English newspaper of only five days' birth was an almost unbelievable wonder. (Newspapers with a Left policy had been regularly sent to me in Russia but none had ever reached me.)

I had not expected the capital of Finland to contain the intoxicating flavour which I found in it on that Sunday morning. Nor, indeed, would it appear as intoxicating to any save to one who had come to it straight from the U.S.S.R. Others would certainly pronounce it charming and well situated. To the traveller from Russia Helsingfors must seem as giddy and gay as Paris to the Middle Westerner.

The houses were clean, solid and well-built, lawns were neat and trim, and the shops appeared overflowing with good things. Fruit-shops, in particular, seemed especially luxurious, and for the pure joy of

looking at colour I stood for a whole three minutes before the window of a large store selling books and magazines. And from the faces of the people had gone that hard expression of strain which modern Russia stamps upon her citizens. Gone too were the teeth stopped with brass, the ungainly stomachs swelled in pregnancy, the sloppy tunics and the dirty rubber shoes. Refinement, colour, dignity were to be welcomed again. Man appeared a childish figure as one reflected that only a night's journey away were living a people who had found it necessary to make a civil war in order to evolve another system of living. How different those systems were occurred to me as I saw a bridal couple walk away from a church that Sunday morning. They seemed to be attired in fancy dress.

As I journeyed through Finland to Stockholm and across Denmark back to England the mood of extreme contentment faded naturally into the background, and I was able to see Russia and her workings in a fairer perspective. In a hundred ways of comparison, racial, historical, geographical, Russia, and the Russian version of communism stood out more clearly than they had ever done while I was in the country itself. On my journey west I again encountered the American who had been with me in the train from Leningrad. He was on his way to "do" Sweden : hence, he was to "do" Norway. In like manner, I presumed he had "done" Russia.

"Uncomfortable country, Russia," I could hear him saying back in the home, "bad food and service just lousy. Interesting, of course. Now, in Norway. . . ."

But Russia cannot, must not, be treated as just

another tourist country. For me, at least, it had achieved, before I left England, an importance not to be expressed in terms of city and landscape. Throughout, this account has been of a purely personal nature. I was travelling alone, for the most part, and can only record the scene as it struck me in the spring and early summer of 1936. It would be easy and fascinating for me to generalise at length on Russian tendencies under its present political system. But I have not sufficient knowledge of economics, Russian history, or of sociology, to deal with that in a satisfactory manner. And the Russian experiment is being watched with such deserved interest by the outside world, and has been considered from its various angles by specialists of all kinds, that I would not dare generalise, nor should I be able to supply any information of a more useful kind than is already available.

My own particular reasons for paying a visit to the U.S.S.R. were outlined in the opening chapter. I should perhaps supply an answer to the problems which were in my mind before I left England. In this, my last chapter, some may expect conclusions, confessions, conversion. I prefer, however, to let the scenes described in the preceding chapters speak for themselves.

Briefly, however, and more to round the full-stop than to form a summing-up, it may not be inappropriate to relate a few of the reflections on modern Russia which came into my head as I travelled homewards.

I soon found that it was impossible, even had I wished to do so, to consider Russia apart from her political system. It was evident on all sides, on every face and expressed on every lip. It would be foolish

of any traveller to imagine that he can avoid contact with it, and just as foolish if he attempted to disregard it. These reflections are, then, bound up with the social experiment and draw from it any significance they may have.

First, then, Russia's geographical position. In judging the prosperity of the Russian people a knowledge of Central European conditions would be, for reasons of comparison, of great advantage. Even a slight acquaintance with the Balkan countries proved valuable to me in familiarising myself with European Russia, and I found as well that travelling overland enabled me to see Russia in her proper place more clearly. I cannot believe that English visitors who take the pilgrims' way from London Bridge to Leningrad, and look on nothing but sea for five days, can judge Russia in fair perspective. Nor—and this view I hold most strongly—can any true estimate be made of Russia and her experiment without some acquaintance with the lands and peoples on the eastern borders of the U.S.S.R. With this familiarity I was not unfortunately equipped, and my deductions therefore must be drawn from that portion of the Soviet Union known as European Russia.

But Russia and England are at opposite corners of the Continent, and English standards cannot be applied to Russia. This being so, it is patently foolish to interpret Russian developments in English terms. It is only necessary to travel mile after mile across the bare steppe country to realise the complete dissimilarity in natural features alone of the two countries. England, moreover, is a highly developed country, Russia at the earliest stages of her industrial development. In Russia there appear to be almost all the

natural resources required by the modern world. The value of her system will be judged by the use that is made of these great potential advantages. Soviet Communism is still in so crude a stage of development that a general review of the system as it appears in Russia is still dominated by Russian characteristics, and is as yet far from achieving, as Stalin himself admits, the communist state envisaged by Karl Marx. If the communist system spreads to other countries of the world, the Russian version will no doubt be regarded in later years as antiquated and awkward. It is possible that the capital of the Soviet Union will one day be removed from Moscow to Berlin, Paris or even New York.

Meanwhile, Russia may be regarded as an excellent experimental field for a communist society. The country is well-nigh self-contained, the people have never enjoyed independent lives and are prepared, since they are comradely by nature, to live a herd-life, and, as they have none of the regard for human life held by the more highly civilised peoples of the West, those in authority do not hesitate to sacrifice the minority for the benefit of the whole. By Western European standards the system is a brutal one, but by Russian standards, with their strong Eastern characteristics, such methods are tolerated.

I am convinced that, although to the English eye living conditions in Russia are pitiably low, that life is very hard indeed, and freedom, as we know it, still far from being achieved, the average Russian is content and enjoys considerably greater advantages to-day than he did under the Tsars. There is no doubt either that wages, though still far lower than the English equivalent, are rising and that living con-

ditions are steadily improving. The more intelligent members of the community are confident of success.

In appearances I found modern Russia displeasing and from many aspects disillusioning. It is, to begin with, far from being a classless society. There is, of course, no opportunity for the exploitation of individuals for private profit and this is ethically one of the most welcome features of the system, but since wages vary enormously (ranging from 100 roubles a month to 1,000 and more) it is natural that living conditions vary accordingly. Some own motor cars and houses of their own, while others must travel steerage and sleep ten to a room. That is not the picture generally believed outside Russia, for communism, though disliked by many as a political creed, has gained for itself a certain kudos, since it is usually believed that communism involves a kind of general share-out, equally benefiting the entire community. Actually, communism in Russia to-day is primarily an economic system based on industry. Industry comes first, and as the industrial development of Russia increases and each project of the Plan is realised, the ethical part of the system retreats further into the distance. The average Russian to-day is very much more inclined to dilate on the successful completion of his factory's quota than to press the necessity of the world revolution for the good of the world. In many ways Russia is more reminiscent of a Black Country than a Red one, as the Englishman understands it, in both senses.

It is a disappointing country for the visitor who expects to hear the words of revolution and to see its spirit reflected in concrete form. He is more likely to have figures and statistics expounded to him in a self-



satisfied manner and, as proof of progress, find his attention directed to a white-washed block of tenement flats which closely resemble similar buildings in his own country.

Ignorance of conditions in the outside world, which is the reason for this lack of proportion and strikes the visitor as provincial and absurd, is partly caused by fear of attack by the fascist powers and the consequent raising of the frontiers. Exchange of news and views from outside Russia is denied by the Government to the average Russian, except in the form officially acceptable.

It is this aspect of communist rule for which the Englishman can find no excuse, though the Russian can. In Russia there has always been autocratic rule, always a system of secret police, always a censorship. The Russian takes such things for granted. They are natural features of his government, whether it be Tsarist or Communist. Russia's version of the totalitarian state with its labour camps, its compulsory military service, its organised industry, its official decrees on artistic questions, and its strong emphasis on nationalism, is the country's natural expression of modern world tendencies. To the Englishman such expression appears most unattractive.

Yet in the people of Russia there is considerable charm. In the great struggle for existence which is common to one and all they have no time for the civilities of the West. Nor are they now, in modern Russia, of the class which has been bred with the soft approach. Some echo of a former graciousness may sometimes be found in the older men and women, but, as a rule, the manner of the present generation is brusque, with a rough and hearty friendliness, a

willingness to dilate on the greatness of their country and to be as obliging as they can be in a straightforward manner. Lack of Western efficiency and of forethought, an absence of the value of time, and above all the deadening spirit of fatalism, causes, in Western eyes, an appalling waste of effort and organisation, and only makes more remarkable the developments which have been effected. But since the average Russian is still regarded by the average Englishman as a Bolshevik bogey, a savage, bearded creature with a bomb in both hands, it cannot be repeated too often that the mass of the Russian people are endowed with many instincts and desires common to the mass of English people. Strange though it may sound, the average Russian is not a brooding anarchist, but a man with a wife and children (the Russian husband indeed is often to be seen pushing the pram and even carrying the baby), devoted to sport, probably a chess-player, certainly a tea-drinker, an *habitué* of the cinema, a lover of music, a reader of Dickens most probably, and one who is not going to fight in a war of aggression, but only if his own country is attacked.

It is necessary to add that in the tourist organisation the traveller comes up against the drilled disciples of materialism with their orders for mass instruction. In such company he is not likely to see Russians as human beings. I remember how at Kiev, after a day spent in the company of an approved guide well-versed in a running Marxist commentary, I encountered the same woman in the street that evening. I asked her where she was going and she answered "Home," adding that her little boy had been ill and she badly wanted to see how he was

getting on. She was transformed into an ordinary woman. Next day, at work again, she had once more become an impersonal preacher.

**Materialism.** It is the extreme materialist character of the doctrine preached in Russia to-day which brought to me, at least, while travelling in the country, alternative feelings of exultation and desolation. That doctrine seems so ill-attuned to the almost indefinable characteristics which give Russia and her people their fascination and charm.

Russia is not a romantic country as Italy and France are romantic. History has not peopled it with gallant and picturesque figures. Nor has man domesticated the land and left behind the monuments of his age. It is not a land for poetic dreaming.

Russia is a country of rolling plains and great distances, of long winters and fierce summers, and its people have had a continual struggle against the severity of the climate. It is a country where the people must till the land or nature will destroy the people, a country of colonists with the history of their race dug deep into the soil.

To-day, the attention of the traveller is constantly turned with talk of figures of production, of mass education, of the hundred other aspects of a planned society, from studying the country itself. Yet, travelling alone, as I did, there came to me from time to time an echo of the aching, melancholy song which Gogol says wanders from sea to sea throughout the length and breadth of the land. The inherent charm of Russia lies in half-tones, in a single phrase, a mood, a particular moment of day.

Once a suggestion of it has been caught the Hollywood-Oxford Group ideals which sound so

loudly to-day strike a note of almost unbearable discord.

As I travelled away from Russia I fell to thinking of how all that I had seen and heard there had affected my own philosophy. I found it had given me a truer balance of men and men's political systems. I had discovered for myself that Soviet Russia held no secret elixir to remedy the world, but that the success or failure of men living together must depend on the good sense of the men themselves.

Continually head had said one thing and heart another, and then, in a moment, heart had suddenly taken up head's position and one was still no better off. Thus—"The capitalist system is clearly illogical ; why should a few dominate the many? A sensible form of government would be . . ."

Then, "My God, when I think of the popular Press, a seaside resort in the North, any suburb-dweller (the real English proletariat), planned work, planned leisure, etc." And "the condition of the poor is intolerable ; how can one be more than temporarily happy when millions, etc.," and "It's all very well to talk of equality of opportunity and no doubt much can be done in that direction, but fools will always be fools and knaves will always be knaves. Abolish the present system, get better education, better conditions, and in place of the present class of picturesque and irritating fools and knaves whose birth or money gives them influence, substitute others, less galling no doubt to the eternal under-dog, less picturesque, incidentally, but no less pernicious in the end."

Thus head and heart reasoned together. With my

thoughts returning always to Russia and what it might hold for the future I sat on the deck of the little steamer which was carrying me past the last islets of Finland towards England. After the sun had set, there was still light for a long time, a kind of unreal shadowless gleaming.

Would primitive communism in Russia, I reflected, like primitive Christianity in the churches, peter out into something as like the Church of England, only far more quickly? Would Mammon, modified to a certain extent, but Mammon still, once more beat God?

The fervent communist may well work on with the consolation that the millenium can, in any case, never come in his lifetime, and even if all his efforts do end in dust and ashes he will get there first. But there must be no religious wars.

The last light slowly faded, and as the steamer chugged smoothly along to the south-west, the little rock peninsulars subsided to mere reefs. We were approaching the open sea, and England.



THE END





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IN PREPARATION

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF  
ARTHUR EDWARD WAITE**

IT IS WITH GREAT PLEASURE THAT WE ANNOUNCE THE publication in the near future of Mr. Arthur Edward Waite's autobiography. Mr. Waite is undoubtedly the foremost authority on Higher Mysticism and Sacramental Religion, and during his long and interesting career has enjoyed an almost unique experience in these realms of thought and action.

He has also met a considerable number of important people—Fiona McLeod, Clifford Harrison, St. John Adcock, Arthur Machen, W. B. Yeats, Algernon Blackwood, Mme. Blavatsky, Dr. Annie Besant, G. R. S. Mead, Rudolf Steiner, Col. Olcott, Countess Wachtmeister, to mention but a few—whilst he has gathered round him a familiar circle whose one vital interest has been the Quest after interior wisdom in strange paths of Ritual and Symbol.

The author's published writings are numerous and include works on the Legends and Symbolism of the Holy Grail, the Secret Tradition in Freemasonry, the Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus and the Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross, as well as successive Studies in Christian Mysticism. Mr. Waite is also a poet whose deep interior vision can be gleaned through reading his *Strange Houses of Sleep* and other verse. Indeed, of his *Book of Mystery and Vision* it has been said that it is "the most successful attempt to sing the mysteries of mysticism since Blake wrote his *Prophetic Books*."

*Illustrated, Eighteen Shillings*

## GREAT FARMERS

by

PROFESSOR JAMES SCOTT WATSON

and

MAY ELLIOT HOBBS

*With a Foreword by* THE RT. HON. WALTER E. ELLIOT

IN THIS BOOK PROFESSOR SCOTT WATSON AND MRS. HOBBS tell, in popular and brilliant style, the story of agriculture during the past century, tracing its attainment to the peaks of prosperity, its decline to long years of depression and its present rejuvenation.

A procession of great men passes through these pages ; men whose lives were devoted to the welfare of their farms and who made names for themselves through the brilliance of their farming. Such men as Robert Hobbs, George Taylor, Henry Dudding, Amos Cruickshank and William Duthrie ; Sanders, Spencer, Sir William Somerville, James Caid and many others.

We can truly say of this book that it is a cavalcade of agriculture which few can afford to miss. Those who remember Professor Scott Watson's brilliant series of broadcast talks will know the sympathy of his viewpoint and the human interpretation he can put upon his subject. Mrs. Elliot Hobbs, a gifted and brilliant personality, is well equipped by virtue of her many connections to collaborate in the production of this important standard work.

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## **MY BIG-GAME HUNTING DIARY**

*From India and the Himalayas*

*by*

**COUNT HENRIK APPONYI**

*With a Foreword by* THE VISCOUNT HALIFAX, K.G., G.C.S.I.

COUNT HENRIK APPONYI, THE AUTHOR OF THESE ENTERTAINING pages, was the son of the great Hungarian statesman, and a man of very wide interests. Not least amongst these was his love of sport, and this book is the diary which the author kept throughout his big-game shooting expedition in India, which he undertook in 1930.

Provided with letters of introduction from Lord Winterton, Lord Lovat and other English friends, he was fêted and banqueted by the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, and the Maharajahs of Bikaner, Udaipur, Patiala and Kapurthala.

The author has a naïve and altogether charming faculty for wonder at the marvels of the East, and although he pays his tribute of appreciation of the princely hospitality he received, the book is by no means a record of social activities.

Count Apponyi was first and foremost a sportsman, filled with the true hunter's passion for the chase. He did not travel to India as a tourist; his one aim was to hunt big game with gun and camera. He was determined to get the best preserves, and he succeeded, having no intention of returning without at least one specimen of every representative wild animal. His

search took him on an arduous and most interesting trip across the Himalayas to the frontier of Tibet, and his diary is further enriched by many beautiful photographs from his camera.

The author's shrewd observation, his sense of humour and, above all, the boyishness which characterised the man, combine to make *My Big-Game Hunting Diary* an extremely fascinating volume.

*With 157 Photogravure Illustrations, Eighteen Shillings*

## **"NOT AT NIGHT" OMNIBUS**

THE FAMOUS "NOT AT NIGHT" BOOKS HAVE SOLD OVER A quarter of a million copies and can safely be said to have been read and enjoyed by at least a million people since the Series was founded in 1925. The "*Not At Night*" *Omnibus* contains the best stories from each of the existing eleven individual volumes, and therefore comprises the "pick of the bunch between two covers".

This bumper volume which is edited by Christine Campbell Thomson (who is probably as good an authority on the really horrible creepy story as anyone) also contains an Introduction dealing with the authors whose stories are included, as well as some interesting details regarding the original idea that started the now-famous Series.

*Three Shillings and Sixpence*

**General Books**

**THE ART OF LIFE**

*by*

**COUNT HERMANN KEYSERLING**

*Translated from the French by K. S. SHELVANKAR.*

COUNT HERMANN KEYSERLING, PHILOSOPHER AND AUTHOR of *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, *South American Meditations* and other well-known works, is known throughout the world as a daring thinker.

*The Art of Life*, Keyserling's latest work, is a collection of essays wherein the author develops the central idea that living is something entirely different from the multifarious activities in which men so readily immerse themselves ; that it involves the effort to master the raw material of experience and transform it into a harmonious and complete expression of the Self.

But no summary description can do justice to a book which covers such an incredibly vast range of topics and deals on almost every page with some new and suggestive idea. Art, philosophy, music, poetry, love, the cult of force, the theory of Nordic supremacy and the value of meditation are but a few of the many questions upon which the author sheds the light of his penetrating intelligence.

Perhaps no other book of his contains in such compact and readable form the pith of Keyserling's message to the modern world ; the quintessence, in his own words, of the concrete and vital method of self-development practised by him and taught at his famous School of Wisdom in Darmstadt.

*About Fifteen Shillings*

## RUSSIAN EXCURSION

by

PETER STUCLEY

Author of *Two Months' Grace* and *Private Stars*

IT WAS A HAPPY CHANCE THAT SENT PETER STUCLEY with his observant eye and satirical pen to modern Russia. Of *Two Months' Grace*, his first travel book, the *Sunday Times* spoke of his "quite unusual talent as a writer of lucidity and charm", and this talent has been put to admirable use in Mr. Stucley's impressions of the Soviet Union.

His journey took him to all the main centres of European Russia, to the Crimea, by boat across the Black Sea to the Caucasus and by aeroplane to Soviet Armenia and Erivan on the Persian border, the most southerly town in the Union. Thence he travelled the length of Russia to Moscow and Leningrad, where he paid particular attention to the art galleries and theatres. He records some interesting conversations with all types, from Commissars and Georgian princes to writers and ballerine, and he has some highly original theories on the evolution of the present system, and the question of Communist culture.

The book is not the result of a hasty journey, but of a lengthy, thoughtful visit, made by an observant and witty young man with no political axe to grind. It presents a full picture of Russia, and is thoroughly up to date.

*Illustrated, Fifteen Shillings*

## UP AND DOWN THE SCALE

*Reminiscences by*

**DETTMAR DRESSEL**

THE WRITER OF THESE ENTERTAINING PAGES WAS BORN in the musical atmosphere of the South Kensington Academy of Music, which was founded by his father, Richard Dressel. Surrounded from childhood not only by music but by musicians and music-lovers, it was Dettmar Dressel's good fortune to become a student under two of the world's most famous violin *maestri*, August Wilhelm and Eugène Ysaÿe.

Like his famous Masters, Dettmar Dressel has, of course, travelled extensively and has played at most of the European Courts. It was on these musical journeys to the Continent that he became personally acquainted with such an imposing host of famous people (merely to turn to the Index of the book will give some idea of the vast concourse), and the author's experiences, together with vivid descriptions of the celebrities he met during these travels, comprise a most entertaining volume.

Yet *Up and Down the Scale* is not just "another volume of musical reminiscences". The author delights the reader with sketches of London life at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the Edwardian era, and relates many vastly amusing and *hitherto unpublished* anecdotes about Royalty, Musical and Social notabilities. Unlike many writers of reminiscences, Mr. Dressel, knowing and known by so many famous people, tells his story from first-hand experience with charming modesty.

*Illustrated, Twelve Shillings and Sixpence*

## **ASPECT OF LIFE**

*An Autobiography of Youth*

*by*

**JOHN KEIR CROSS**

BY CHANCE ONE EVENING WE HEARD A YOUNG MAN SPEAK from Broadcasting House, and although what he said only occupied a few minutes, our curiosity in the owner of the voice and the adventures which had come his way made us decide, then and there, to get into touch with him. Mr. John Keir Cross accordingly came to see us, and after hearing more about his experiences and his points of view, we suggested that he should write an account of his young though interestingly eventful life.

*Aspect Of Life* is the result. It is a story of the younger generation ; an autobiography of a twenty-two-year-old Scotsman who rose in revolt against the uncongeniality of an occupation which could offer him nothing but monotony and a limited happiness. He therefore threw up a "safe" job and went on the road as a wandering ventriloquist, performing at street corners and on village greens throughout Scotland and England. Mr. Cross's account of his home life, his youth and early manhood, as well as the record of his adventures on the road are related in a lively though thoughtful style which reveals something of the troubadour spirit which inspires the writer.

As iconoclast, itinerant ventriloquist, aspiring playwright and composer of music (since writing this book he has had a musical play broadcast), Mr. Cross tells the very human story of how he has striven to plan his life according to his own philosophy. How far he has



## General Books

succeeded, the reader must judge for himself. Viewed in its entirety this literary experiment will, we believe, prove of interest to those who recognise the expediency of listening with sympathetic ear to the clamorous voice of Youth.

*With Frontispiece, Eight Shillings and Sixpence*

# THE LAND THAT NEVER WAS

*by*

ALYSE SIMPSON

THIS IS NOT A TRAVEL-BOOK, BUT A RECORD OF THE adventures—and the eventual disillusionment of ideals—of a very young married couple who, lured by the idea of freedom and open spaces, “took the plunge” and sought fortune in the sunny land of Kenya. With them they took £2,000 and an immense hope; and having at length found and purchased a small farm, they set out on the Great Adventure by growing coffee and maize.

The simple, straightforward and honest account of all that happened embodies this book. It is a record of fact, shorn of all embellishments and related without self-pity. The result is not only a readable but singularly exciting chronicle, for the book is packed with information which a large public ought to know.

The charm of the style holds a fascination all its own; whilst comedy, tragedy and thrills jostle one another and lure the reader into complete absorption in the author’s true story.

*Eight Shillings and Sixpence*

## PORTRAITS AND PERSONALITIES

*by*

**DR. ARTHUR COMPTON-RICKETT**

*Author of I Look Back, A History of English Literature, etc.*

DR. ARTHUR COMPTON-RICKETT HAS FULFILLED MANY rôles in literature. He is autobiographer, biographer, novelist, poet, playwright and essayist, whilst of his *History of English Literature* Thomas Hardy declared that it was "the best single-volume history" known to him.

The author has touched life on many sides and has come into close contact with many notabilities, and it is of some of these famous people that Dr. Compton-Rickett writes in his new volume.

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